STORY

DEVOTED SOLELY TO THE SHORT STORY

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C O N T E N T S

So Help Me	3	*Nelson Algren*
Dunky Fitlow	15	*A. E. Coppard*
A Choice	20	*Grace Stone Coates*
Artist at Home	27	*William Faulkner*
Big Brother	42	*John S. McNamara*
Sondersheim	46	*Linda Henly*
The Gilded Six-Bits	60	*Zora Neale Hurston*
Sewing	71	*Elisabeth Thomas*
What the Nightingale Sang	75	*Mikhail Zostchenko*

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EDITORS: WHIT BURNETT · MARTHA FOLEY

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CONTRIBUTORS: Nelson Algren, who lives in Chicago, was born in Detroit in 1909. After his graduation from the School of Journalism, University of Illinois, he did considerable hobo traveling through Northern Mexico, Southern Texas and Louisiana. "So Help Me" is his first published short story. . . . Grace Stone Coates is assistant editor of *The Frontier,* published at the University of Montana, by H. G. Merriam. She is a native of Kansas and the author of a volume of short stories "Black Cherries" and "Mead and Mangel-Wurzel" and "Portulacas in the Wheat." . . . John S. McNamara is a new writer, "Big Brother" his first published story. He was born in Bridgeport, Conn., in 1907, and is a graduate of Dartmouth, where he was editor of the *Jack-o'-Lantern.* He worked for a time on a West Coast freighter and on a New York trade journal. . . . Linda Henly was born and raised in Philadelphia, but is now a resident of New York, where she has just finished writing a play. She is the mother of three children. "Sondersheim" is her first short story. . . . Zora Neale Hurston is a native of Florida, born in Eatonville, the first incorporated Negro town in America, and there began her education. In 1927 she was admitted to Barnard College, the first Negro to be admitted to the school. She majored in anthropology under Dr. Frank Boas and was graduated in 1928; her collection of folk tales of the Negroes of the South is considered the largest ever made in that field; part of them were published by the American Folklore Society. She is a member of the American Ethnological Society and has done numerous research articles. "The Gilded Six-Bits" is her first appearance in STORY. . . . Elisabeth Wilkins Thomas, author of "Ella" and "The Story of Silas Woodward," is a native of Brooklyn, studied at Vassar and later taught at Wellesley. She is now living in Rhode Island. . . . Of William Faulkner, A. E. Coppard and Mikhail Zostchenko, little need be said other than that these three are pretty generally recognized as the respective representatives of the highest development of the contemporary short story in America, England and Russia. "Artist at Home" is Faulkner in a new mood; Coppard's "Dunky Fitlow" ranks with the classics in his Golden Cockerel volume "The Black Dog" which a few years ago placed him at the pinnacle of the stylists in the English short story field; Zostchenko has appeared previously several times in the pages of STORY. "What the Nightingale Sang" is the longest of his stories and is here presented in its first English translation, in its complete Russian form; eight pages were deleted when the story appeared recently in German.

SO HELP ME

by

Nelson Algren

NOW perhaps you-all will think that I am just lying to you, and maybe you will even think that Luther really wanted to get rid of the Jew kid so's we would oney have two ways to split instead of three, but you know, Mr. Breckenridge, guys like me can't never get away with bull like that to big-league lawyers like yourself, so you can just taken my word for it Fort didn't really mean to hurt the Jew kid a-tall, and that's the truth so help me.

I seen this Jew high-school kid first in New Orleans on the Desire street wharf luggin' along a bran' new leathern suitcase almost as big as hisself. He come up to me and axes where can he find the shipping steward please, so I judged he was lookin' for a job, and figgerin' to save him trouble I told him they ain't no use lookin' for work around here Bub. You-all think he took my word for it, Mr. Breckenridge? No, he has to go off and see the steward for hisself. Well, soon's he finds out he comes back and sets down on the wharf and commences lookin' scared-like into the fog over the river. I pulls over to him, figgerin' that any bird with rags as dressy as his'n might have a little extra cash handy, so I axed him for a handout, and he look at me like he never seen me befo', and then hand me a dime and look out into the fog over the river again.

I had a hunch I could wrangle a meal out of him if I just hung on a minute, so I settled down again easy-like and ax him has he worked on the big boats befo', 'though I seen he ain't. He just says no, and don't seem anxious to get acquainted a-tall. That made me stubborn, so I just set still, and in a couple of minutes it began to drizzle, and he picks up his suitcase to go, so I got up too and went with him, makin' small talk all the while just to see where he was a-stayin' at. He walked down Tchoupitoulas and turned on Poeyfarre until we got to the Circle, and there he flop down on a bench, and I seen he did not know where to go, even 'though he had money in his pocket. We just set there a space under a tree, lookin' up at Lee with water runnin' down

his back. A dollar-woman come by and give us the eye, and the Jew kid turn to me and axes do I know the lady, and I says no o'course not. Then he axes why did she look at you so funny then, and now perhaps you will think that I am just lyin' to you, Mr. Breckenridge, but that Jew didn't know what that whore wanted a-tall. I explained gentle-like, on account him bein' so young and all, but do you think I could get him to believe he coulda bought that girl? Not him—he hadda see for hisself. So I took him through the district and he seen I wasn't just lyin' to him. He looked a little scared and worried when we come back to the Circle. When we set down again he remarks he wouldn't never spend no dollar of his that way, and I tol' him he could get most of them for six-bits if he jewed them a little. He gimme a look when I says to jew them, but he didn't let on he was one, so how was I to know? O' course I wouldn't never have picked up with him if I'd knowed.

We got a mite friendly then, and I tol' him I was goin' down to the Rio Grande Valley, 'cause it come into my head just then how nice and warm it was in the Valley while we was sittin' shiverin' in the rain in the Circle. He ax me what I am goin' to do in the Valley, and I thought quick and says I am going to pick oranges and make three-four dollars a day doing so, and I looked at him sideways to see would he swaller that, and he did, hook, line, and sinker. So I tol' him some more about the Valley. Then I waited a minute and says casual-like maybe you would like to come along, and he say yes he would. So we shaken hands on it and he let me sleep on the floor of his room that night and in the morning I got breakfast off him also. After breakfast we walken down to the Soup line yards to wait for a freight through to Houston, and they was about twenty fellas and some niggers there already. All the while we was waitin' the Jew kid kep' throwin' out hints how it might be better we should hitch-hike it, so I seen he was a mite scared, and ax him ain't he never rid a freight befo' though I seen he ain't. He says no he hasn't never. So I says well I ain't never hitch-hiked and ain't aimin' to start now, so that left the gate wide open for him to blow, but he just set still and get that scared look all over his mush again. Right then I surmised he musta somewhere got the idea they was somethin' to see in the Valley.

Some of the fellas was cookin' somethin' by the side o' the track, an' I walked over casual-like to see was it Mulligan, when who do my eyes light on but Luther Morgan what I palled with on the state farm at Wetumpka. I yelled how are you Fort old pal, on account Luther was in Fort Myers so long, and he was glad to see me too. I called the kid over and axed him to

shake hands with my old pal Fort Morgan, so they shook hands and Fort had a bottle of bay rum and he give me a shot but didn't offer the kid none cause he oney had a mite left for hisself. I don't think the Jew kid wanted one anyhow. It begin to gimme a pain just to look at that goddam scared lookin' puss o' his. I like a boy with guts.

Well, Fort finished the bay and tried to bum two-bits from the kid for another bottle, but the kid said no and walked away from him. Fort went off a little after that, and he musta gone clean back to Canal street, 'cause he was gone a couple of hours and when he come back he had five cans of Sterno in his pockets and another bottle of bay. He was pretty wobbly and when he seen the kid right away he wants to roll him, and pick up a rock as big as your head to do it with. If ever I seen a scared sheenie in my life it was that Jew kid sittin' on his shiny new leathern suitcase shakin' all over like a leaf. He was so scared that even the niggers over to the side laugh a little. I got Luther quieted down a bit, and he pull out a whole handful of silver and heave it all over the yards. I oney got a Canadian dime out of it, but the Jew kid didn't get nothin' a-tall.

We heard the freight whistlin' just then, and the fellas began to pick theirselves up—all exceptin' Fort. Fort has made up his mind he ain't goin' to hop nothin' but blind baggage on a silk manifest, and I couldn't convince him that there weren't no manifest due on the Soup line before November anyhow, and even that one would be goin' the other way. But all he would say was I will wait here till November then and if it is going the other way I will go the other way too. There isn't any reasoning with Luther when he is in that frame of mind, so I took two of the cans of Sterno and eighteen cents he had in his watch pocket, and dragged him over to the side out of the way of the brakeman.

Then the freight pull up about a hundred yards down the track and the kid says hurry lets get on, like he thought they wouldn't be no seats left if we was late, so I says what's the rush—why go way down there when it will certainy come up here? It'll save you draggin' that suitcase which I surmise is pretty heavy? So we waited till it drag up to hop it.

Now perhaps you-all will think I am just lying to you, Mr. Breckenridge, but so help me it's the truth—it musta been about two a.m. and we was crossin' some river—musta been the Atchafalay'—when the Jew kid sit up straight real suddent and yell "We're cut apart!—cut apart!—cut apart!" just like that. Well, just for a second he give me nawful turn 'cause I thought

we was really cut in two and running wild, but soon's I got myself together I knew we wasn't, and I tol' him to lay down and quit yellin' like he was nuts. I seen guys in the army get excited in their sleep, but this Jew was the worst thing ever—he jump up and head straight for the open door. Now the Atchafalay' may not be so wide as the Mississippi but it's just as deep, and I set him down befo' he got hisself all wet. In the morning he don't remember nothin' of what he say the night befo'. I woulda tol' him to go back home, that I had decided to go to Salt Lake City instead, but I kep' wonderin' about that leathern suitcase of his.

When we got to Houston we had a chance to catch a hot shot clear down to the Valley, 'though we had to walk two miles out of town to hop it—but what do you think that damn snot done when it pull up and I was shovin' him into the blind, suitcase and all? He back out quick like a crawfish and say he thought he'd rather hop a freight. I says o. k. Meet me by the depot in San Juan. And the train pulls out. I never expected to see him again.

I got down to San Juan just as it was gettin' light, and I guess that Sterno didn't do me no good 'cause I got off on the depot side and the brakeman called me a son-of-a-bitch and I yelled back, You yellow Mexican bastard you, I hope they paint you green in Matamoros, oney I said it in Mex, and he run after me and give me one on the side of the head that did not even sting a little on account I got so much Sterno in me.

I walked downtown and seen a young punk in puttees lookin' for guys to pick oranges, and I thought hell with that noise. I tried it oncet in Florida and worked all day and oney made thirty-nine cents, and so I said none o' that for me I come down here to keep warm not to work.

Well, I'd been in San Juan almost two days and had clean forgot all about the Jew kid, Mr. Breckenridge, and was settin' on the packin' shed platform sunnin' myself, thinkin' maybe Fort would drag in, when I seen the Jew kid.

He was settin' top a refrigerator car pert as you please, with his hat smashed in and his clothes all over spots, but the suitcase shiny as ever. He weren't down-hearted a-tall though—happiest I'd ever saw him, and wants to go to work right away pickin' oranges and make three-four dollars a day. So I tol' him the oranges wasn't ripe quite yet, and he begin to look worried again. Then he ax me where was I stayin' and I says I guess maybe I will rent myself a tourist cabin and if you wish to stay with me I shall pleased to have

you and will surely get you a job three-four dollars a day. He agrees, so we start for the tourist camp and on the way I tell him, casual-like, I got no ready cash but can get forty-five, fifty dollars, from my brother Bryan what is in Apalachicola on Tuesday, so he can put up his wrist-watch for security I will speak to the landlady at the camp just give it to me, but he back up quick like a crawfish at that and say no not your life the wrist-watch it is a gift from his girl in Cincinnati so I said tell me all about it, because I needed time to think how am I going to get this wrist-watch. So we set down on the curb in front of the gas station and that was when he told me he was a Jew and he had a girl in Cincinnati where he come from who wasn't no Jew a-tall. He had sewed her up but his pa wouldn't let him marry her on account she ain't no Jew and her folks is very poor on top of it. Her pa said the kid must marry her or pay him a lot o' dough or go to jail, but the girl herself she wasn't even sore at him, and he liked her a lot also and woulda married her but he didn't have no money to marry on and was still in high school. So he was just about nuts not knowin' what should he do, 'cause his old man won't help him. He decides he must quit school and get hisself a job immediately so's he could get married before the baby was born, but he couldn't find no job in Cincinnati nowhere, and then he read in the paper they was men needed in Las Vegas to work on the Boulder Dam. So he tol' the girl he would go there and get a job and he would send for her, and that made them both very happy, oney when he got to Las Vegas he learns there is oney eight jobs left and there is 4,500 other fellas what had snuck in in front of him. Then he was ashamed to go home and say he can't find no job so he hitch-hiked to New Orleans to try to ship out, and that was how I met up with him.

Just as he finished tellin' me I thought of a good idea, and I says come down to the telegraph office with me, David, I wish to send a telegram to my brother Bryan in Apalachicola, so we went down and I axed Bryan for forty dollars and gave it to the kid to read, and had the charges reversed. I knew Bryan would pay for the telegram since he would not know from who it was before he opened it. He would cuss me out when he read it o'course, and would tear it up immediately and would wonder was I nuts or what. We hung around the office until we found out it was accepted, and the Jew kid was convinced I was not just lying to him that I had a brother Bryan in Apalachicola. He give the woman the wrist-watch, and we taken a cabin and also get some groceries off her. I had not slept on a mattress for

quite some time, and so before we turned in I said to myself, Homer tonight at least you shall sleep better than you have since you was sprung from Wetumpka. Now maybe you will think I am just lying to you, Mr. Breckenridge, but do you know I did not get scarcely twenty minutes rest that night? First I laid awake a long time wonderin' it is certainy very peculiar that this Jew should not even open his suitcase to see what is inside it, and I do not approve of wiliness in any of its many forms. He was breathin' deep, and I got to thinkin' maybe should I open it myself, when all of a suddent he give one unholy shriek, sit straight up, grabs tight hold of the side of the bed, and begins that nut line about bein' cut apart again. "Cut apart!" he yells, "Cut in two! Thy blood is not my blood!—We're cut apart!" and the moonlight was on his face like I seen it on the dead faces at Cantigny, and his eyes was bright and staring straight ahead. My hair, if I had any, woulda stood up then, 'cause he begin to get up slow, wavin' those skinny arms like they was white snakes, like he was tryin' to push somethin' away from in front o' him, and didn't have no strength to do it. I got my hooks in him then and set him down hard, and he went back to sleep arguin' somethin' fierce with somebody. So I couldn't sleep much after that, bein' afraid he might get up again and decide to do a little cuttin' apart on his own.

By the time it is morning I had decided to shake him, suitcase or no suitcase, but Fort showed up that day, and that made me change my mind.

I got a job for the kid pickin' oranges with a gang of Mexicans, but did not go along myself on account I wish to see what is it inside the suitcase. I dived for it soon's he was gone, but do you know what, Mr. Breckenridge?—He'd locken it and taken the key with him! Naturally I was deeply grieved at such suspicious tactics behind my back as it were, because I am a proud man by nature and a direct descendant of Edmund Ruffin on my mother's side. I went off to the freight depot feeling bad, and set down just to sun myself a bit, and reflected when would my luck change.

It was about noon when Fort come in. I was still settin' on the depot platform, and the noise of the engine waken me, and when I sat up the first thing I seen was Fort. I kidded him a bit about waitin' for the silk manifest and we had a good laugh together over it, and I commenced to feel better. I tol' him I was stayin' with the Jew kid until he would get wise about the telegram, so Fort axes me what have I been doin' for groceries and I tol' him I have been getting those on credit also. Then he remarks that he is hungry and is in great need of tobacco, so we strolled over to the camp, and Fort

waited outside, and the woman still thought it was my watch, so she give me two packs of tobacco and a bag of stale tortillas.

About 6:30 I seen the kid comin' down the road and walked down to meet him, on account I want to tell him Fort is sleepin' on his cot. His shirt was tore almost in two and the backs of his hands was all scratches and he has a scratch on the side of his neck which one look tol' me is goin' to come a tropical sore very shortly. He was all streaked with dried sweat, but was not appearing worried, so I ax him how much has he earned, and he says seventy-six cents, at which I supposed he was just lyin' to me, Mr. Breckenridge, because only a Mexican can earn that much in a day. I woulda done it myself if I'd oney knowed they was payin' that much. Then I remarked, casual-like, that Fort was inside and might as well stay with us until I got my money, which would probly be tomorrow. I seen he didn't like that, but then I figgered what can he do about it if he says anything to hurt my feelings again I shall simply refuse to redeem his watch.

At first Fort and the kid did not have very much to say to each other, but after supper Luther showen him the place back of his ear where he was shot at Cantigny and let him feel the steel plate there and that broke the ice and Fort showen him the marks on his left leg too which he got in a job upstate, but which he tells the kid he got also at Cantigny.

Fort made out on the floor that night, and the kid didn't raise no rumpus, and I didn't say nothin' to Fort 'cause I thought maybe the boy is ashamed of it so I will not antagonize him by telling Luther. I can see now all right I shoulda give Fort a hint, but how was I to know?

In the morning early the Jew goes off to pick some more oranges but Fort and me didn't get up in time and I took to reflectin' it would certainy be a fine thing when the boy got paid on Saturday night because the woman in the store was already actin' very independent, as 'though she was becoming reluctant to extend our credit much further and was not after all a person who had firm faith in human nature. Then I went down to the store and learned my reflectin' was just about correct, because she gave me what I axed for and then said I couldn't never have any more until I paid up. We sat around smokin' awhile after that and Fort thought that the kid must have tellen her it was not my watch at all but his watch which was a present to him from somebody in Cincinnati. If I'd thought Luther was right I would certainly have grab that suitcase and taken it on the lam right then and there,

oney I wasn't sure, and they was Saturday night to look forwards to. The kid come back just as it was getting dark out, and reports he had earned sixty-nine cents more, so now we have $1.45 coming from the Magic Valley Fruit Exchange.

Well, it was oney Friday morning, and our credit weren't no good, and all we had left was old bread and coffee. The kid tried to get them to advance his $1.45, but they wouldn't do it and he went off to work looking worried again. But they wasn't really nothin' to worry about.

Fort tried to panhandle a few nickels in the afternoon, but all the places tol' him he would have to go to the relief station in Alamo or starve. So I copped a half-dozen grapefruit seconds from the packing house, and that was all we had for supper, and by morning we have all three of us decide we would go to Alamo to the relief station there. Now I suppose you-all will think that I am just lying to you, Mr. Breckenridge, but do you know that when we got to the Station that kid would not go inside? He backed out quick like a crawfish. Of course we couldn't bring nothin' out to him, so I guess he musta been pretty hungry when we got back to San Juan. I didn't ax him. But he went to bed lookin' kinda white soon's we got home, and laid with his face to the wall. He give me a pain just to look at him. I like a boy with guts. Fort and me went to Alamo again in the afternoon an' when we come back he was still in bed and axes me will I go down to the Exchange and collect his money for him and buy some groceries on the way back. I didn't want Fort along on account Fort is very avaricious, but he come anyhow, and we got the $1.45, and right away he wanted to buy mescal, but I put my foot down on that. I came straight out for tequila or nothing at all. We got a big pint for $1.00 and give the Mex girl who fetched it two-bits because she had to go clear to the other end of town to get it. After we killed it we still had 20 cents left but I got to thinking of the kid how maybe he was gettin' sick and all, and I stopped in the Jitney Jungle and bought a quart of milk. After all it was his money even if he was a Jew. When I was buyin' the milk I seen Fort starin' at the cash register, and when we got outside he says, tryin' to be casual-like, let us walk about a bit, Homer, that tequila has give me a headache. I guessed what was on his mind and says perhaps we should better take the milk home first and then walk about a bit, I believe our baby is hungry; but Fort says no we should first walk about a bit.

So when we got a ways out of town he propositions me we should hoist

the Jitney Jungle and I axes him where can we get a couple rods, and he says we oney need one, Homer, and I got that, and he pull a roscoe off his hip. That surprised me somewhat because I had been completely unaware Fort was packin' a rod on his person, but nevertheless it does not convince me and I says it is all very well for you to say one roscoe is enough when you are carryin' it but what about me? So then he says I can have the roscoe if I wish to be selfish and greedy, but he will get a long cut short for hisself. I am again taken by surprise by this remark about a long cut short for hisself and I says perhaps you already have the long cut short? And he says no, but he knows where at he can get one for three dollars any time. I says that is very encouraging but where is this place where for three dollars you can get a long cut short anytime? And he told me it is the same place where at we bought the tequila.

I began to get very interested and I ax him what he is going to use for money to get the long cut short, and where he is going to get a car, and several other things he could not answer right off. I reminded him he could never get out of the Valley without a good car, and he got peeved and says he will pull the job alone if I have lost my guts. I told him not to get sore, because I was with him the same as always, and I axed him who will grab the oday? And Luther answer that one so quick I seen he musta been thinkin' about the hoist for a couple days at least. The Jew will grab the oday he says, like it is all settled.

Then we was back in town, almost to the camp, and we shut up.

Now will you believe me, Mr. Breckenridge, but we hadn't no sooner turned the corner into the camp when I stumbled against a old hitching post and dropped that milk right out of my hand and busted it? That was very strong tequila, Homer, Fort says, and then we was inside the cabin. He was still in bed, but he was curled up double, and all the bed clothes was messed up and when he seen me his eyes look like a wolf's, and then he seen I got no groceries, and he moans and turns his face to the wall. I says do not take it so hard, kid, they would not give me the money and Fort and I been arguin' with them ever since, and now it is too late to get it, the cashier has went home. Sometimes I think pretty fast so now I said let me take your suitcase down to the pawnshop, David, and will get enough groceries for to last us until I get my money from Bryan, my brother in Apalachicola. He says I do not believe you have a brother anywhere, but take the suitcase and get me something to eat with it and come back right away I am very hungry. Fort

tried to come with me again, but I stopped him in time. Why should I have to split everything with that mug? He has very deceptive ways anyhow.

I taken the suitcase to the pawnshop and they was two gray suits in it, almost new, a pair of shoes, some shirts and b. v. d.'s, and a heavy blue wool sweater with a large white "B" sewed on the front of it. I got three dollars for the clothes and three for the suitcase and I spent two dollars for groceries in the Jitney Jungle just like I tole the kid I would, and I got a pint of mescal for seventy-five cents which I drunk right away, and then I held out three for the long cut short and took to reflectin' how it was only two days ago that I was thinking my luck wasn't going to change. On my way back I seen a new Chrysler I knowed belong to the druggist on the corner, and in front of it a big elephant ears was standin'. It was almost nine I guess when I got back, and the kid was lookin' so scared it give me a turn just to look at him—more scared than hungry now, and I knowed somethin' had been goin' on. It was in the air. Fort was sittin' nex' to him on the bed when I come in, but got up quick and sat down at the table when I come in. I didn't say nothin'. I just fixed us up some stew, and the kid dragged hisself out o' bed in his dirty underwear, but didn't eat much a-tall. Nobody said much until we finished eatin' and then Fort cough a little and announces to me that the kid wanted to come in with us on the hoist real bad, and I was a little surprised I did not know Fort was going to proposition him so quick, so I figger to myself he musta squeezed the Jew.

After that the ice was broke and the oney important question left was when to pull it. Fort musta forgot about that telegram I have sent because he suggests nex' Saturday night, which is a full week away, and I says no to that right away, and when I said it the mescal in me bubbled a little, and I began to hope Fort would argue about it. So I says real emphatic Tuesday or Wednesday. I was thinkin', too, that we had to have the kid, and if we waited a week he would certainy crawfish. Fort says to me, Homer I am surprised at you, you know very well there won't be no mokoy in the pot on Tuesday or Wednesday, Saturday night is the only night, you should know that. So I says tonight is Saturday night, and Fort got up an' put on his coat, an' the kid set up a howl about his wrist-watch, an' Fort give him a look, an' he shut up like a oyster.

We all three of us went down to the Mex bootlegger an' give him three bucks for the long cut short, an' I took it an' beat it down the alley to the garage back of the drug store, an' the druggist was just puttin' the Chrysler

up for the night, an' I hopped in with him and give him directions, an' he seen I meant business an' was scared as the devil, but he got me in front of the Jitney Jungle without hittin' nothin. Fort an' the kid was waitin' in front, an' I made the druggist change places with me easy-like. Then Fort an' the Jew went inside, I heard Fort start barkin', an' I seen him shove the kid. Then the kid grab about half the money, whirls an' tears for the door droppin' bills all over the place, an' Fort give him the shoulder, an' he went back an' taken it all then. I'd thought he'd break his neck comin' out, he come so fast, but Fort back out slow until he got through the door. Then he turn so quick he even surprised me, and in two leaps he was inside the car and we was goin' fast. Fort threw the druggist out when I turned the corner into the highway to McAllen, an' about a minute after that they got started behind us, an' I give her everything she got.

I never seen Fort so nervous befo' in all my life. He wanted to stick to the main road right through McAllen an' shoot it out if they was waitin' for us there, but I didn't say nothin' 'cause I know it don't pay to argue with Fort when he is nervous and has liquor inside him on top of it. I just turned up the first side-road I seen, run twenty feet into a orange grove, an' lit out for the tracks. They come right behind me, the Jew breathin' hard, an' we wasn't a minute too soon. The bulls from McAllen come by a-tearin' an' turn up the orange grove road. I was scared then, an' Fort started cussin' out the warden at Wetumpka under his breath. If they'd gone forty feet further they woulda seen the car an' knowed we was hidin' close by, but they didn't, an' went back to the highway and tear out for San Juan again.

We waiten there by the tracks real quiet-like, an' it musta been about 11:30 a string of empties headed for San Anton' come along, an' we hoppen it. Fort was sure that they was going to stop us in McAllen an' search for us, an' wouldn't quit fingerin' the trigger of that long for a minute. The Jew kid don't say nothin' but look so almighty goddam scared I didn't know whether to laugh or kick his ugly little face in with my heel. I like a boy with guts.

They didn't look for us in McAllen, an' we got through Falfurrias o.k. I figgered we was out of the Valley then an' didn't have to worry no more so long as we got out of sight before we hit San Anton'. But Fort kep' mumblin' he ain't goin' back to breakin' rock again no matter what happen, an' I dozed off a-listenin' to his blabberin', an' so I wasn't wide awake when it started, Mr. Breckenridge, an' it was all over in a second, an' so I cannot say rightly just what did happen. I oney know I heard that yell from the cor-

ner, "We're cut apart!—cut apart!" an' he then he jump up an' say, "Thy blood is not my blood!" an' make straight for Fort. Well now you-all can't blame Luther in a way. He was jumpy in the first place, an' him an' the kid hadn't never clicked much anyhow, an' maybe he'd squeezed the kid a mite to make him come along, an' o' course he didn't know the Jew was asleep. He jes' heard that yell an' seen him comin', an' the long was in his hand. I guess that Jew never knew what hit him. He jes' doubled up, stretched out, made a gurgly sound in his neck, an' that was all. O' course we had to clear then, but even then they'd never gotten me if Luther hadn't pointed, an' on top of that tryin' to make you-all believe it was me had the long all the time.

Now maybe you-all will think that I am just lying to you, Mr. Breckenridge, and maybe you will even think I really wanted to get rid of the Jew kid so's we could split oney two ways instead of three, but you know guys like me can't never get away with bull like that to big-league lawyers like yourself, Mr. Breckenridge, so you can just taken my word for it I didn't mean to really hurt the Jew. So help me.

DUNKY FITLOW

by

A. E. Coppard

ONE fine day I told this tale to a stranger, and he turned on me, as to say it was not true. Well, well. There must be all sorts of truth in a world, but there is one truth some never seem to lay a hand on, and that is: the truth that is never in themselves. They cannot make a stomach for it. Yet there is a truth of likeness as well as a truth of fact, and many a man has been called a murderer when he only destroyed a villain. I was going on my way to the fair at Asnamorig, and halfway between the goosebridge and the haggard I met this wholesome carpenter and his dog.

Says he: "Good day."

I said it was fine.

So down we sit and I tell him the tale.

Had I—then said he—a chew of tobacco?

I had not. I offered him the little pear the girl O'Stancy had given me the night before, a sweet round pear.

"Take it," I said.

And it was then he declared the tale not only was untrue, but it never could be, never would be, true in life or time, and he should not believe it. Well, I didn't want anyone to believe it then; but now, if you read on, you may get used to it and I'll not care whether you believe it or no.

Dunky Fitlow's the name. It is the name of a man not too young, and not too old, and rather huge; nobody else's coat would ever fit him and he, for sure, could never slip his foot into the throat of another man's shoe; but his life was full of poetry and sleep—rather more of sleep than the other. Sometimes he would only wake up for an hour or two in the week, and then he might say a few marvelous golden words of the poetry, and off to sleep again. Or maybe he would eat like a wolf—and then off to snoring sleep, without any of the poetry. And once in a while you might see him drifting

through the fields of summer, watching the corn to grow and talking with old men.

"The song of the oats," he would say, "is better than the song of the wheat, but the song of barley is a tangle of vipers hissing."

"It is so," the old men answered, "but all's one to the thresher."

"The thresher's arm," he would say, "flogs raff and grain together, though a sheaf of corn is like a lovely woman."

"It may be so," the old men answered, "but all's one in wedlock."

It was time, everybody said it was time, for him to be thinking of making a marriage. But what woman in her senses would ever seek a match with the like of Dunky Fitlow! He had coaxed them all, the fine, the lovely ones. They said he had no beauty. He courted all the rest, the widows, the crooked, the sour spinsters. They said he was no ways industrious. So there was only the camelfaced woman left then, but her he would not pursue.

"What is the matter with that man?" the camelfaced woman asked when she heard of him.

"There is something astray in his heart," was the answer of one and all.

"Well," said she, "if the heart is dull in his breast," said she, "let love unlock it," she said. "I'll marry him."

She laid her traps for him, but there was no nice appearance on the woman.

"Bondage is the doom of all, be it life, or love, or labor; wealth, woe, or wickedness. Sleep is deliverance—I'll be free." So Dunky lay in his snoring sleeps for longer than before, and when waking he was always harder to come at.

But it is a poor fowler that never rejoices in the coy bird. One day, as he was going down from his sleep, Dunky met the camelfaced woman coming up the stairs. He made to go past her, right by, without any small word of greeting.

"Hi! What's this!" cried she.

"What's what?" And Dunky yawned a very great yawn.

"O, you know! Well enough you know!" the camelfaced woman replied.

"I don't know a thing at all about it," said Dunky.

"Ho!" says she. "You don't, do you!"

"Go on. Keep your distance," Dunky said.

"Where are you going, my little poeteen?" she asked him very tenderly, her eyes looming at him.

"Ah, let go of me!" cried Dunky, quivering like an aspen on a grave.

But she would not let go of him, she never did; and in no time at all it seems they were to be married, and great preparations were made, for she had much wealth and was lavish in her ways.

On the day they were to be wed Fitlow rose up early and went forth to take the bright air. The lake was a bowl of silver in the golden hills, swans were rafting along, and a heron brooded in the reeds like a sentinel at prayer. As he was walking by the lake Dunky spied in the road ahead of him a marvelous blooming of white, all flashing and moving. When he came up to it, there lay a large dewy turf upturned, and on it were scores of butterflies, all white. Dunky's shadow disturbed them for a moment and they fluttered up idly into the air, but soon they settled down on the turf again into one huge lily-bloom, throbbing and alive. He stood admiring it before he went on. He had not gone a score of steps further when he heard a cart behind him, and he looked back.

There was a man in the cart and a woman with him, and they pulled up beside the bloom of the butterflies.

"What are they doing and all?" the woman asked. Her voice was harsh in the pure morning air.

"Breeding," the man replied.

"I don't care to be looking at that," said the woman.

The man sat in his cart, flicking his whip at the butterflies, and every time he struck some of them down the woman laughed. The man said nothing—just flick, flick, flick, in his stern duty, until they were all killed.

Dunky walked on to the church. It was early yet, and the camelfaced woman had not arrived, so he sat down on a bench to rest his bones. When his bride came Dunky was in a snoring sleep, and none could wake him, not bride or priest or people, and they had to leave him there in the church, and he was sleeping for three days. Each day the bride and priest and people came and nudged him, or pulled his nose, or thumped his loins—all lost labor, for nothing could ever rouse Dunky from his fast slumbers. But on the fourth day he rolled over awake, rubbed his eyes, and married the camelfaced woman.

She took him home. "Early to bed," said the bride, for she was stone weary waiting for him. When Dunky followed her to the bridal chamber the poor woman was already asleep.

"Ah, me; ah, well," sighed Dunky, "I was never a one to disturb a woman sleeping."

Off he dropped again, while the bride slept on, unkissed and curst. Thus it continued between them for many days and nights, each asleep when the other was awake. She was what she was, and he hadn't the heart to flatter her. And then one time Dunky awoke, and there was no one there at all, he was lying cold. Up he got, did on his clothes and went to the room downstairs, but there was no one in. The house was empty, she was gone. There was a bowl of roses on the table, but the dropped rose leaves were lying in a heap all round the bowl—she had been gone a long time, gone for good and all! Then Dunky felt the pinch of loneliness, and he sighed for her. She was gone entirely, and there was no more left for him to do but what he had always done before he had married her: to sleep, to wake, to go into the fields, to talk to the oldish men with their beards and long coats and walking sticks.

"O, this is no life at all," sighed Fitlow, as he passed the time o' day with them. Winter and summer they wore the same long rusty overcoats, their beards were white, and they would doddle hither and yon. Now their eyes drooped as if from too much gazing in the sunlight.

"We have just come out," they said, "to pass the time away." And they would count the lambs, or watch the fish cruising about the idle streams. Happen a hare would rove through the paddock of the old windmill. Whenever they saw a man crossing the fields any way off they would peer after him and begin to ruminate: "Now who be that man? He's going towards the north. I ought to know that man. If I did, I'd know where he be going."

Or it might be the Springtime, when sleep had forsaken him altogether. Daffodils had begun to peer in the gardens, and bare trees seemed to stretch out their arms to catch something Dunky could not perceive, which only they were aware of. As he walked along he could see, a way off, a tree nobly proportioned and perfect; yet when he got to it he found it was two trees, one behind the other, and neither of them much to look at by themselves.

"O, it is no life at all!" he sighed. "Time's will is on the wing, and I go lingering on, lingering on."

The camelfaced woman was done with him; he was not too young, not too old, but there was no enjoyment of him; she was what she was, and he hadn't the strength to flatter her; she was done with him.

Then one day, in the height of summer it was, she was strook down

in the glaring sun and perished of a stroke. With half a heart Fitlow went to bury his wife, and when he had buried her and come out of the church he burst into tears and sobbed like a child. Close by the porch stood a man, a middling sort of man, and when he saw the grief and the true tears of Dunky Fitlow, this man asked:

"What is the poor fellow crying like that for?"

"Hush!" murmured the neighbors. "He has just come from burying his wife."

"O, the foolish creature!" said the man. "Tell him, tell him I'll chop my old wife for his dead one, and pay all expenses, I will!"

"Hush, hush! For shame!" cried the neighbors all. And of course the neighbors were angry, but the other did not care.

"Foolish man!" He kept on grinning and roaring. "I'll chop him, I'll chop him!"

And Dunky was all in black, save one of his shoes laced up with a bit of green cord. The camelfaced woman was dead and gone, unkissed and curst—he too, he knew it. "Darling," he whispered; and he was weeping like a child.

A CHOICE

by

Grace Stone Coates

IT was not easy for Fanchon to speak. She took hold of the arms of her chair, hard, to think her words before answering. She was sitting in her own little rocking-chair, that was too small for anyone else to use except turned on its side. Fanchon did not like to have it laid flat on its arm so that it stopped being a real chair. Her mother was too big to use it. Evelyn was slender, and could sit into it, but couldn't get out of it without pushing the arms apart until they squeaked. Evelyn was nineteen. Last year Evelyn had been three times as old as Fanchon, but this year she was not. She wasn't strong, like Fanchon; Evelyn was mother's lady, but Fanchon was father's right-hand man.

It was hard for her to say words when something wonderful was happening. Her father spoke again . . . "whatever you want. Make your own choice—if it is something that doesn't cost too much."

She was not waiting to decide. She knew. Before he had finished asking her the first time, she had known. She was waiting for her voice to come quiet and even, as though happiness were not crowding intolerably in her throat.

She held tight to the arms of her chair and looked straight ahead toward the wall, where her sister's gloves hung on a nail above the wood-box. They were the gloves Evelyn put on before she touched anything rough. While she held her eyes on the gloves her voice came, smooth and small, like a river when there had been no rain. Each word pronounced itself separately: "Would a clay-bowl balloon pipe cost too much?" She understood about money. Her father had told her. They were paying for the farm, and there was no money for other things.

Her father did not answer, and she looked up at him, questioning again . . . "a clay-bowl pipe?" He was tall. Taller than the rack behind him where

the hired men hung their hats. He was looking down at her, smiling, but looking surprised, too.

"A clay pipe! What for?"

"For soap bubble balloons. They blow with spools, but the balloons break when I try to shake them off." She could hear her mind saying, *not cry . . . not cry . . . not cry. . . .* She took a deep breath, and the need of crying drew back into her.

"I see. A soap bubble pipe. Yes, you may have that. A clay pipe should cost but five cents. And you may have five cents' worth of candy, besides."

"Chocolate creams!" She could scarcely find breath.

"Not gumdrops? Not good old stand-by jelly beans?"

"Oh, daddy, just this one time!"

"Very well—but there won't be so many pieces, you know. It will be harder to make them last."

"I know a way. . . ."

He stood, still looking down on her. He was almost as tall as the door. His eyes were so dark there was never anything in them but bright darkness.

"Do you want to come with me to get the clay pipe—if that's your choice? I'm going to town."

"I'll ask!" And she was past him like a quick wind.

She found her mother on the kitchen porch, paring apples from a pan on her lap. Words were birds, now, flying forward. "I am going with daddy! Mother, may I? I am going to town with him." *How could hands be so slow!* Her mother laid down the paring knife. She laid down the apple she was quartering. She drew upward from under the pan a corner of the towel spread across her lap, and dried her fingers. She dried the knife blade; and, lifting the pan, leaned sideways to set it on a bench by the wall. She laid the knife beside it. *So long . . . so long . . . father would be ready. . . .*

One emptied hand on Fanchon's shoulder turned her around, the other bent forward her head.

"Wash the back of your neck. You can't go to town in those overalls. Put on your dress—but wash, first; and bring me the comb and brush when you come."

Fanchon was back, breathless. Her mother's arm across her shoulders held her steady against the sweep, sweep, of the hairbrush. She looked sideways at her mother to see whether it was a hug, but it was not. . . . The queer

smell of the brush. . . . *So slow . . . so long . . . her father might forget that she was going with him.*

No one was in sight when she ran to the door. Her throat felt tight. No, there was the buggy—he had not begun to hitch up, yet.

It was her birthday. She was seven. She was grown-up, now. *Seven.* She stood adjusting herself to the new span as to a garment, and looked down the front of her dress to see how long a way it was to her feet.

She did not talk when she climbed into the buggy. Her father did not speak. She hugged something vague and exciting, that was inside her, and yet within her arms. Threads of happiness ran along her arms where they touched her body, and she pressed them to her. Words sang themselves in her mind . . . she was to have a choice . . . a choice. She would choose a clay-bowl pipe. She would look at everything, and choose a pipe—that was having a choice. If she had had to stay at home she could have had a choice only in her mind. Now she could have a choice with her whole self. A clay-bowl pipe for soap balloons. The chocolate creams were not a choice. Her father would say, "Chocolate creams," and buy them without looking. They were extra-special because it was her birthday, but they were not a choice.

She had never had chocolate creams of her own before. Evelyn had them. Louis Bordeau gave her great boxes of candied nuts and chocolates. Evelyn would laugh up at Louis while she opened the box and passed it to him. Then she would carry it upstairs to her dresser with the drawers that locked, and eat candy in bed, mornings, while she read. Fanchon did not like Louis, because he laughed when Evelyn made fun of her. Of all the hired men she liked Tony best.

At the store, the clerk was nice. She smiled at Fanchon all the time she waited on her. "I want to look at everything, and choose a clay-bowl pipe," Fanchon told her; and the clerk said that would be the best way.

Fanchon looked at rings with small blue sets. She looked at doll slippers. She looked at a red glass bird. She looked at as many things as she could make herself look at before she asked about pipes. There were six fastened on a stiff cardboard. She held the card in her hand and looked them over and over until she touched one with her finger and said, "This one." It was different from all the rest. It was hers.

Her father came down the aisle. She had wanted to be with him to help buy the chocolates, but he touched his pocket, and said, "I have the candy."

The clerk brought her the clay pipe wrapped in a narrow box. She had got the box after talking to a man about it, explaining that this was a very special purchase. The man had not listened much—he had nodded, and walked away. The box was tied with a blue and white string. The colors wound over and under, over and under, so that the string was never all white or all blue. When she got home, after unwrapping the box she would ask Tony to hold one end of the string while she untwisted it. She would have two strings, then, one blue and one white. She would tie one end of each to the doorknob, and twist them up again, but they would never be just as they had been.

The string twisted and untwisted in her mind while the horses trotted, and when they stopped it was like a knot in the string. While her father and she walked together from the barn she looked up into his face. She wished he would remember to give her the chocolate creams before they got to the house. She wanted to carry them, with the clay pipe; but he did not remember.

"It is my birthday," she said, "and I have chocolate creams, and a choice."

"Yes, yes, indeed!" he answered, and handed her the sack from his pocket. It was a brown paper bag, smaller than any she had seen before. She could feel it lumpy as she took it, and smell the chocolate. The bag would be hers, too. When it was empty it would be hers to put away. She would not let Louis or anyone puff it up to hear it *pop!* She would not let Evelyn have it. She watched Bumble tear barking down the path, mad with welcome, and could feel him soft against her feet.

As they came near the house her father said, "Remember to pass your candy around." She knew that . . . *pass it around . . . pass it around . . .* it was grown-up to pass things around. When company came, if there was cake on the plate mother always passed it around. At the door she delayed a moment, to keep Bumble from feeling unhappy because he must stay outside.

The table was set, and the lamp lighted, when they went in. Her mother had heard them coming, and had begun breaking eggs into the skillet. Evelyn was sitting in Fanchon's rocking-chair, in front of Louis. She did not belong in it, and her sitting in it made the arms loose, but she would not keep out of it. The hired men had already washed, and were waiting for supper. *Five men to cook for,* her mother would say, *and still nobody thinks there is anything to do around the house!*

Fanchon felt large when her father opened the kitchen door, and she

stepped from behind him into the light. The room seemed small, and the people in it, small; and she felt large. She was carrying something of her own, that she could pass around. Always before, persons passed things to her instead of she to them. She had a choice to show them, and something she could pass around. She would wait about showing them the choice until her mother would let her have soapsuds.

She smiled up at her father. He and she had been together, so she lifted the sack to him, first.

"Your mother," he said, "and then your sister."

She walked fast to her mother, and lifted the sack. Her mother's hands were full. She laid the pancake turner she held in the warming oven. It had holes in it. It was to turn pancakes, and to take up eggs with, too. Her mother took a chocolate cream from the bag, and said, "Thank you." She stepped over to lay it beside her plate on the white table cloth.

"Take that dress off before you do anything else," she added, without looking at Fanchon.

Fanchon set the bag beside the chocolate cream at her mother's plate, but took the narrow box with her. When she came back in overalls her mother's chocolate cream was gone. She lifted the sack and carried it to Evelyn. She hated Evelyn, sitting where she had no right to, spreading the arms of the chair.

Evelyn was pretty. Her slender fingers were white. She thrust them into the sack, and drew out two chocolates. "They're just your color, you little darky," she said. "Why don't you try wearing a hat when you chase out in the sun!" She popped a chocolate cream in her mouth, and tilted her chin at Louis.

Fanchon lifted the bag to her father. He had not yet sat down. She offered it to Tom, to Joe, to Louis, to Dave, to Tony.

The sack was empty, now.

She carried it to the table, laid it down, and pressed it smooth. It was a blurred oblong against the white cloth. She smoothed it hard, and folded it over and over, holding the breath back in her body, and not winking. She must keep her eyes wide, or the tears would come outside. She put the inch-square of folded bag in her pocket. The room had become a circle of staring eyes. Only Evelyn's were hateful. Her father's were black fire, burning expectant upon hers. Suddenly she was past him, like a quick wind, and be-

yond the opened door. She felt the darkness cold against her cheeks where they were wet, and Bumble's nose cold against her hand.

The doorway was a square of light that framed her father, then it was dark once more. The laughter in his voice was comfort. "How did the candy come out, old-timer?"

Her voice surprised her, clear and strong: "There isn't any. But the sack's in my pocket. It is mine." She stood motionless.

He bent over her and found her hand, lifting it empty in his open palm. He pressed into it a smooth cone—a fairy mountain.

"Put it in the sack."

"No."

"Yes," he insisted. "Not because I am sorry for you. I am not. Nor because you gave it to me. It is mine. But I do not care for it, and I want you to have it."

Her fingers wavered over it. He closed them round it. "Give me the bag." He fumbled it open in the darkness. "Drop it in." He guided her hand, twisted the sack at the top, and handed it back to her. "Share whatever you have, no matter how it comes out. That is the way. Always." He took her hand. "Come with me to the barn."

She walked beside him, her hand in his. He shoved the barn door open a crack, and peered into the black nothingness. "*Whoa, Ginger!*" he said; and to her, "Are you all right?"

She was.

He pushed the door to, and they turned back. The kitchen seemed large, when they came in, and the persons in it looked large and far away. Her mother was setting dishes heaped with food on the table.

Tony's chair was nearest the door, and Fanchon walked over to stand beside him. It was good to stand without speaking close to someone she liked. He put his arm around her. His fingers slid to her wrist, to her hand, and tugged gently at the paper sack. She stiffened and looked toward him, but he was not laughing. She loosened her hold. He opened the bag and dropped something into it.

"Here, Tone!" called Dave. He tossed a small object that Tony's hand intercepted. Dave's face was speckled like a turkey's egg. His bow legs straddled his chair, tilted against the wall, and he kicked genially at Big Tom as Tom slouched past him. Tom's grin was amiable under his shock

of towsled hair. One huge hand dropped something into the open sack on Tony's knee, the other spread for an instant over Fanchon's head. "You're a swell kid, Franc, old top," he said, and ambled back, hooking his foot around the leg of Dave's chair as he passed.

"Take this, Fanchon," said Louis. A chocolate cream lay on a bit of paper in his outspread palm.

"No!" said Fanchon. She did not like Louis, though he was handsomer than Tony.

"Take it," he repeated. His eyes were on her sister.

Evelyn's cheeks were aflame. "You make me tired!" she cried. "What did the kid pass her candy around for, if she wanted to keep it all herself?" She spread herself free of the chair so impatiently that its joints groaned; and, rising, started for the stairway door.

"Don't be running off, now, just as supper is ready," her mother called sharply.

"Oh, bother supper!" she retorted.

The stair door slammed behind her, and Louis's eyes narrowed after her without indulgence.

"Maybe she's gone to bring us down some swell candy—eh, Tom?" chuckled Dave; and evaded Louis's black look by staring at a fly still skimming the dark ceiling in wide circles.

But Fanchon walked to the table beside her higher chair. Not high chair . . . not a baby's chair . . . really more grown-up than the others', because it had longer legs. She emptied the sack on her plate, and set the creams in a brown circle. She could think about them until her mother reminded her to attend to her supper. She would not eat one until Saturday. If she sliced each chocolate cream down twice through the top, like a cake, there would be almost as many pieces as there would have been of jelly beans. One slice of every four would be Bumble's—and she must try again to teach him to eat special things slowly. That would leave three pieces, each Saturday, for her. She would eat them one at a time, and pretend a different story with each.

She studied the circled cones intently, counting, to see how many pieces they would make. She had to start over again twice. Twenty. Except that five of them were Bumble's. Five Saturdays. She must ask her father how near five Saturdays would come to her next birthday.

ARTIST AT HOME

by

William Faulkner

ROGER HOWES was a fattish, mild, nondescript man of forty, who came to New York from the Mississippi Valley somewhere as an advertisement writer and married and turned novelist and sold a book and bought a house in the Valley of Virginia and never went back to New York again, even on a visit. For five years he had lived in the old brick house with his wife Anne and their two children, where old ladies came to tea in horse-drawn carriages or sent the empty carriages for him or sent by Negro servants in the otherwise empty carriages shoots and cuttings of flowering shrubs and jars of pickle or preserves and copies of his books for autographs.

He didn't go back to New York anymore, but now and then New York came to visit him: the ones he used to know, the artists and poets and such he knew before he began to earn enough food to need a cupboard to put it in. The painters, the writers, that hadn't sold a book or a picture—men with beards sometimes in place of collars, who came and wore his shirts and socks and left them under the bureau when they departed, and women in smocks but sometimes not: those gaunt and eager and carnivorous tymbesteres of Art.

At first it had been just hard to refuse them, but now it was harder to tell his wife that they were coming. Sometimes he did not know himself they were coming. They usually wired him, on the day on which they would arrive, usually collect. He lived four miles from the village and the book hadn't sold quite enough to own a car too, and he was a little fat, a little overweight, so sometimes it would be two or three days before he would get his mail. Maybe he would just wait for the next batch of company to bring the mail up with them. After the first year the man at the station (he was the telegraph agent and the station agent and Roger's kind of town agent all in one) got to where he could recognize them on sight. They would be standing on the little platform, with that blank air, with nothing to look at except a little yellow station and the back end of a moving train and some mountains

already beginning to get dark, and the agent would come out of his little den with a handful of mail and a package or so, and the telegram. "He lives about four miles up the Valley. You can't miss it."

"Who lives about four miles up the valley?"

"Howes does. If you all are going up there, I thought maybe you wouldn't mind taking these letters to him. One of them is a telegram."

"A telegram?"

"It come this a.m. But he ain't been to town in two-three days. I thought maybe you'd take it to him."

"Telegram? Hell. Give it here."

"It's forty-eight cents to pay on it."

"Keep it, then. Hell."

So they would take everything except the telegram and they would walk the four miles to Howes', getting there after supper. Which would be all right, because the women would all be too mad to eat anyway, including Mrs. Howes, Anne. So a couple of days later, someone would send a carriage for Roger and he would stop at the village and pay out the wire telling him how his guests would arrive two days ago.

So when this poet in the sky-blue coat gets off the train, the agent comes right out of his little den, with the telegram. "It's about four miles up the Valley," he says. "You can't miss it. I thought maybe you'd take this telegram up to him. It come this a.m., but he ain't been to town for two-three days. You can take it. It's paid."

"I know it is," the poet says. "Hell. You say it is four miles up there?"

"Right straight up the road. You can't miss it."

So the poet took the telegram and the agent watched him go on out of sight up the Valley Road, with a couple or three other folks coming to the doors to look at the blue coat maybe. The agent grunted. "Four miles," he said. "That don't mean no more to that fellow than if I had said four switch frogs. But maybe with that dressing-sacque he can turn bird and fly it."

Roger hadn't told his wife, Anne, about this poet at all, maybe because he didn't know himself. Anyway, she didn't know anything about it until the poet came limping into the garden where she was cutting flowers for the supper table, and told her she owed him forty-eight cents.

"Forty-eight cents?" Anne said.

He gave her the telegram. "You don't have to open it now, you see," the

poet said. "You can just pay me back the forty-eight cents and you won't have to even open it." She stared at him, with a handful of flowers and the scissors in the other hand, so finally maybe it occurred to him to tell her who he was. "I'm John Blair," he said. "I sent this telegram this morning to tell you I was coming. It cost me forty-eight cents. But now I'm here, so you don't need the telegram."

So Anne stands there, holding the flowers and the scissors, saying "Damn, Damn, Damn" while the poet tells her how she ought to get her mail oftener. "You want to keep up with what's going on," he tells her, and her saying "Damn, Damn, Damn," until at last he says he'll just stay to supper and then walk back to the village, if it's going to put her out that much.

"Walk?" she said, looking him up and down. "You walk? Up here from the village? I don't believe it. Where is your baggage?"

"I've got it on. Two shirts, and I have an extra pair of socks in my pocket. Your cook can wash, can't she?"

She looks at him, holding the flowers and the scissors. Then she tells him to come on into the house and live there forever. Except she didn't say exactly that. She said: "You walk? Nonsense. I think you're sick. You come in and sit down and rest." Then she went to find Roger and tell him to bring down the pram from the attic. Of course she didn't say exactly that, either.

Roger hadn't told her about this poet; he hadn't got the telegram himself yet. Maybe that was why she hauled him over the coals so that night: because he hadn't got the telegram.

They were in their bedroom. Anne was combing out her hair. The children were spending the summer up in Connecticut, with Anne's folks. He was a minister, her father was. "You told me that the last time would be the last. Not a month ago. Less than that, because when that last batch left I had to paint the furniture in the guest room again to hide where they put their cigarettes on the dressing table and the window ledges. And I found in a drawer a broken comb I would not have asked Pinkie (Pinkie was the Negro cook) to pick up, and two socks that were not even mates that I bought for you myself last winter, and a single stocking that I couldn't even recognize anymore as mine. You tell me that Poverty looks after its own: well, let it. But why must we be instruments of Poverty?"

"This is a poet. That last batch were not poets. We haven't had a poet

in the house in some time. Place losing all its mellifluous overtones and subtleties."

"How about that woman that wouldn't bathe in the bathroom? who insisted on going down to the creek every morning without even a bathing suit, until Amos Crain's (he was a farmer that lived across the creek from them) wife had to send me word that Amos was afraid to try to plow his lower field? What do people like that think that out-doors, the country, is? I cannot understand it, anymore than I can understand why you feel that you should feed and lodge——"

"Ah, that was just a touch of panic fear that probably did Amos good. Jolted him out of himself, out of his rut."

"The rut where he made his wife's and children's daily bread, for six days. And worse than that. Amos is young. He probably had illusions about women until he saw that creature down there without a stitch on."

"Well, you are in the majority, you and Mrs. Crain." He looked at the back of her head, her hands combing out her hair, and her probably watching him in the mirror and him not knowing it, what with being an artist and all. "This is a man poet."

"Then I suppose he will refuse to leave the bathroom at all. I suppose you'll have to carry a tray to him in the tub three times a day. Why do you feel compelled to lodge and feed these people? Can't you see they consider you an easy mark? that they eat your food and wear your clothes and consider us hopelessly bourgeois for having enough food for other people to eat, and a little soft-brained for giving it away? And now this one, in a sky-blue dressing-sacque."

"There's a lot of wear and tear to just being a poet. I don't think you realize that."

"Oh, I don't mind. Let him wear a lamp shade or a sauce pan too. What does he want of you? advice, or just food and lodging?"

"Not advice. You must have gathered at supper what his opinion of my mentality is."

"He revealed pretty clearly what his own mentality is. The only thing in the house that really pleased him was Pinkie's colored head-rag."

"Not advice," Roger said. "I don't know why he shows me his stuff. He does it like you'd give caviar to an elephant."

"And of course you accept his dictum about the elephant. And I suppose you are going to get them to publish his book, too."

"Well, there's some good stuff in it. And maybe if he sees it in print, he'll really get busy. Work. Or maybe someone will make him mad enough to really write something. Something with an entrail in it. He's got it in him. It may not be but one poem. But it's there. Maybe if he can just stop talking long enough to get it out. And I thought if he came down here, where he will have to walk four miles to find somebody to talk to, once Amos comes to recognize that blue coat."

"Ah," Anne said. "So you wrote him to come. I knew you had, but I'm glad to hear you admit it of your own free will. Go on to bed," she said. "You haven't done a stroke of work today, and Lord only knows now when you will."

Thus life went along in its old pleasant way. Because poets are all different from one another, it seemed; this one, anyway. Because it soon developed that Anne doesn't see this poet at all, hardly. It seems that she can't even know he is in the house unless she hears him snoring at night. So it took her two weeks to get steamed up again. And this time she is not even combing her hair. "Is it two weeks he's been here, or just two years?" She is sitting at the dressing table, but she is not doing anything, which any husband, even an artist, should know is a bad sign. When you see a woman sitting half dressed before a dressing table with a mirror and not even watching herself talk in the mirror, it's time to smell smoke in the wind.

"He has been here two weeks, but unless I happen to go to the kitchen, I never see him, since he prefers Pinkie's company to ours. And when he was missing that first Wednesday night, on Pinkie's evening off, I said at first, 'What tact.' That was before I learned that he had taken supper with Pinkie's family at her house and had gone with them to prayer meeting. And he went again Sunday night and again last Wednesday night, and now tonight (and though he tells me I have neither intelligence nor imagination) he would be surprised to know that I am imagining right now that sky-blue dressing-sacque in a wooden church full of sweating niggers without any incongruity at all."

"Yes. It's quite a picture, isn't it?"

"But apart from such minor embarrassments like not knowing where our guest is, and bearing upon our patient brows a certain amount of reflected ridiculousness, he is a very pleasant companion. Instructing, edifying, and self-effacing. I never know he is even in the house unless I hear your type-

writer, because I know it is not you because you have not written a line in—is it two weeks, or just two years? He enters the room which the children are absolutely forbidden and puts his one finger on that typewriter which Pinkie is not even permitted to touch with a dust-cloth, and writes a poem about freedom and flings it at you to commend and applaud. What is it he says?"

"You tell. This is fine."

"He flings it at you like—like . . . Wait; I've got it: like flinging caviar at an elephant, and he says, 'Will this sell?' Not, Is this good? or Do you like it? Will this sell? and you——"

"Go on. I couldn't hope to even compete."

"You read it, carefully. Maybe the same poem, I don't know; I've learned recently on the best authority that I am not intelligent enough to get my poetry at first hand. You read it, carefully, and then you say, 'It ought to. Stamps in the drawer there.' " She went to the window. "No, I haven't evolved far enough yet to take my poetry straight; I won't understand it. It has to be fed to me by hand, when he has time, on the terrace after supper on the nights when there is no prayer meeting at Pinkie's church. Freedom. Equality. In words of one syllable, because it seems that, being a woman, I don't want freedom and don't know what equality means, until you take him up and show him in professional words how he is not so wise, except he is wise enough to shut up then and let you show both of us how you are not so wise either." The window was above the garden. There were curtains in it. She stood between the curtains, looking out. "So Young Shelley has not crashed through yet."

"Not yet. But it's there. Give him time."

"I'm glad to hear that. He's been here two weeks now. I'm glad his racket is poetry, something you can perpetrate in two lines. Otherwise, at this rate . . ." She stood between the curtains. They were blowing, slow, in and out. "Damn. Damn. Damn. He doesn't eat enough."

So Roger went and put another cushion in the pram. Only she didn't say exactly that and he didn't do exactly that.

Now get this. This is where it starts. On the days when there wasn't any prayer meeting at the nigger church, the poet has taken to doping along behind her in the garden while she cut the flowers for the supper table, talking to her about poetry or freedom or maybe about the flowers. Talking

about something, anyway; maybe when he quit talking all of a sudden that night when he and she were walking in the garden after supper, it should have tipped her off. But it didn't. Or at least, when they came to the end of the path and turned, the next thing she seemed to know was his mug all set for the haymaker. Anyway, she didn't move until the clinch was over. Then she flung back, her hand lifted. "You damned idiot!" she says.

He doesn't move either, like he is giving her a fair shot. "What satisfaction will it be to slap this mug?" he says.

"I know that," she says. She hits him on the chest with her fist, light, full, yet restrained all at the same time: mad and careful too. "Why did you do such a clumsy thing?"

But she doesn't get anything out of him. He just stands there, offering her a clean shot; maybe he is not even looking at her, with his hair all over the place and this sky-blue coat that fits him like a short horse-blanket. You take a rooster, an old rooster. An old bull is different. See him where the herd has run him out, blind and spavined or whatever, yet he still looks married. Like he was saying. "Well, boys, you can look at me now. But I was a husband and father in my day." But an old rooster. He just looks unmarried, a born bachelor. Born a bachelor in a world without hens and he found it out so long ago he don't even remember there are not any hens. "Come along," she says, turning fast, stiff-backed, and the poet doping along behind her. Maybe that's what gave him away. Anyway, she looks back, slowing. She stops. "So you think you are the hot shot, do you?" she says. "You think I'm going to tell Roger, do you?"

"I don't know," he says. "I hadn't thought about it."

"You mean, you don't care whether I tell him or not?"

"Yes," he says.

"Yes what?"

It seems she can't tell whether he's looking at her or not, whether he ever looked at her. He just stands there, doping, about twice as tall as she is. "When I was a little boy, we would have sherbet on Sunday," he says. "Just a breath of lemon in it. Like narcissus smells, I remember. I think I remember. I was . . . four . . . three. Mother died and we moved to a city. Boarding house. A brick wall. There was one window, like a one-eyed man with sore eyes. And a dead cat. But before that we had lots of trees, like you have. I would sit on the kitchen steps in the late afternoon, watching the Sunday light in the trees, eating sherbet."

She is watching him. Then she turns, walking fast. He follows, doping along a little behind her, so that when she stops in the shadow of a clump of bushes, with her face all fixed, he stands there like this dope until she touches him. And even then he doesn't get it. She has to tell him to hurry. So he gets it, then. A poet is human, it seems, just like a man.

But that's not it. That can be seen in any movie. This is what it is, what is good.

About this time, coincident with this second clinch, Roger happens to come out from behind this bush. He comes out kind of happen-so; pleasant and quiet from taking a little stroll in the moonlight to settle his supper. They all three stroll back to the house, Roger in the middle. They get there so quick that nobody thinks to say goodnight when Anne goes on in the house and up the stairs. Or maybe it is because Roger is doing all the talking himself at that moment, poetry having gone into a slump, you might say. "Moonlight," Roger is saying, looking at the moon like he owned it too; "I can't stand it anymore. I run to walls, an electric light. That is, moonlight used to make me feel sad and old and I would do that. But now I'm afraid it don't even make me feel lonely anymore. So I guess I am old."

"That's a fact," the poet says. "Where can we talk?"

"Talk?" Roger says. He looked like a head-waiter, anyway: a little bald, flourishing, that comes to the table and lifts off a cover and looks at it like he is saying, "Well, you can eat this muck, if you want to pay to do it." "Right this way," he says. They go to the office, the room where he writes his books, where he doesn't even let the children come at all. He sits behind the typewriter and fills his pipe. Then he sees that the poet hasn't sat down. "Sit down," he says.

"No," the poet says. "Listen," he says. "Tonight I kissed your wife. I'm going to again, if I can."

"Ah," Roger says. He is too busy filling the pipe right to look at the poet, it seems. "Sit down."

"No," the poet says.

Roger lights the pipe. "Well," he says, "I'm afraid I can't advise you about that. I have written a little poetry, but I never could seduce women." He looks at the poet now. "Look here," he says, "You are not well. You go on to bed. We'll talk about this tomorrow."

"No," the poet says, "I cannot sleep under your roof."

"Anne keeps on saying you are not well," Roger says. "Do you know of anything that's wrong with you?"

"I don't know," the poet says.

Roger sucks at the pipe. He seems to be having a little trouble making it burn right. Maybe that is why he slams the pipe down on the desk, or maybe he is human too, like a poet. Anyway, he slams the pipe down on the desk so that the tobacco pops out burning among the papers. And there they are: the bald husband with next week's flour and meat actually in sight, and the home-wrecker that needs a haircut, in one of these light blue jackets that ladies used to wear with lace boudoir caps when they would be sick and eat in bed. "What in hell do you mean," Roger says, "coming in my house and eating my food and bothering Anne with your damned. . ." But that was all. But even that was pretty good for a writer, an artist; maybe that's all that should be expected from them. Or maybe it was because the poet wasn't even listening to him. "He's not even here," Roger says to himself; like he had told the poet, he used to write poetry himself, and so he knew them. "He's up there at Anne's door now, kneeling outside her door." And outside that door was as close to Anne as Roger got too, for some time. But that was later, and he and the poet are now in the office, with him trying to make the poet shut his yap and go up to bed, and the poet refusing.

"I cannot lie under your roof," the poet says. "May I see Anne?"

"You can see her in the morning. Any time. All day, if you want to. Don't talk drivel."

"May I speak to Anne?" the poet says, like he might have been speaking to a one-syllable feeb.

So Roger goes up and tells Anne and comes back and sits behind the typewriter again and then Anne comes down and Roger hears her and the poet goes out the front door. After awhile Anne comes back alone. "He's gone," she says.

"Is he?" Roger says, like he is not listening. Then he jumps up. "Gone? He can't—this late. Call him back."

"He won't come back," Anne says. "Let him alone." She goes on up stairs. When Roger went up a little later, the door was locked.

Now get this. This is it. He came back down to the office and put some paper into the typewriter and began to write. He didn't go very fast at first, but by daylight he was sounding like forty hens in a sheet-iron corn-crib, and the written sheets on the desk were piling up. . . .

He didn't see or hear of the poet for two days. But the poet was still in town. Amos Crain saw him and came and told Roger. It seems that Amos happened to come to the house for something, because that was the only way anybody could have got to Roger to tell him anything for two days and nights. "I heard that typewriter before I crossed the creek," Amos says. "I see that blue dressing-sacque at the hotel yesterday," he says.

That night, while Roger was at work, Anne came down the stairs. She looked in the office door. "I'm going to meet him," she said.

"Will you tell him to come back?" Roger said. "Will you tell him I sent the message?"

"No," Anne said.

And the last thing she heard when she went out and when she came back an hour later and went upstairs and locked her door (Roger was sleeping on the sleeping-porch now, on an army cot) was the typewriter.

And so life went on in its old, pleasant, happy way. They saw one another often, sometimes twice a day after Anne quit coming down to breakfast. Only, a day or so after that, she missed the sound of the typewriter; maybe she missed being kept awake by it. "Have you finished it?" she said. "The story."

"Oh. No. No, it's not finished yet. Just resting for a day or so." Bull market in typewriting, you might say.

It stayed bullish for several days. He had got into the habit of going to bed early, of being in his cot on the sleeping-porch when Anne came back into the house. One night she came out onto the sleeping-porch, where he was reading in bed. "I'm not going back again," she said. "I'm afraid to."

"Afraid of what? Aren't two children enough for you? Three, counting me."

"I don't know." It was a reading lamp and her face was in the shadow. "I don't know." He turned the light, to shine it on her face, but before it got to her face she turned, running. He got there just in time to have the door banged in his face. "Blind! Blind!" she said beyond the door. "Go away! Go away!"

He went away, but he couldn't get to sleep. So after a while he took the metal shade off the reading lamp and jimmied the window into the room where the children slept. The door from here into Anne's room wasn't locked. Anne was asleep. The moon was getting down then, and he could

see her face. He hadn't made any noise, but she waked anyway, looking up at him, not moving. "He's had nothing, nothing. The only thing he remembers of his mother is the taste of sherbet on Sunday afternoon. He says my mouth tastes like that. He says my mouth is his mother." She began to cry. She didn't move, face-up on the pillow, her arms under the sheet, crying. Roger sat on the edge of the bed and touched her and she flopped over then, with her face down against his knee, crying.

They talked until about daylight. "I don't know what to do. Adultery wouldn't get me—anybody—into that place where he lives. Lives? He's never lived. He's——" She was breathing quiet, her face turned down, but still against his knee—him stroking her shoulder. "Would you take me back?"

"I don't know." He stroked her shoulder. "Yes. Yes. I'd take you back."

And so the typewriting market picked up again. It took a spurt that night, as soon as Anne got herself cried off to sleep, and the market held steady for three or four days, without closing at night, even after Pinkie told him how the telephone was out of fix and he found where the wires were cut and knows where he can find the scissors that did it when he wants to. He doesn't go to the village at all, even when he had a free ride. He would spend half a morning sitting by the road, waiting for somebody to pass that would bring him back a package of tobacco or sugar or something. "If I went to the village, he might have left town," he said.

On the fifth day, Amos Crain brought him his mail. That was the day the rain came up. There was a letter for Anne. "He evidently doesn't want my advice on this," he said to himself. "Maybe he has already sold it." He gave the letter to Anne. She read it, once.

"Will you read it?" she said.

"I wouldn't care to," he said.

But the typing market is still steady, so that when the rain came up this afternoon, he had to turn on the light. The rain was so hard on the house that he could watch his fingers (he used two or three of them) hitting the keys without hearing a sound. Pinkie didn't come, so after a while he quit and fixed a tray and took it up and left it on a chair outside Anne's door. He didn't stop to eat, himself.

It was after dark when she came down the first time. It was still raining. He saw her cross the door, going fast, in a raincoat and a rubber hat. He

caught her as she opened the front door, with the rain blowing in. "Where are you going?" he said.

She tried to jerk her arm loose. "Let me alone."

"You can't go out in this. What is it?"

"Let me alone. Please." She jerked her arm, pulling at the door which he was holding.

"You can't. What is it? I'll do it. What is it?"

But she just looked at him, jerking at her arm and at the door knob. "I must go to the village. Please, Roger."

"You can't do that. At night, and in all this rain."

"Please. Please." He held her. "Please. Please." But he held her, and she let the door go and went back up stairs. And he went back to the typewriter, to this market still going great guns.

He is still at it at midnight. This time Anne has on a bathrobe. She stands in the door, holding to the door. Her hair is down. "Roger," she says. "Roger."

He goes to her, fast for a fat man; maybe he thinks she is sick. "What? What is it?"

She goes to the front door and opens it; the rain comes in again. "There," she says. "Out there."

"What?"

"He is. Blair."

He draws her back. He makes her go to the office, then he puts on his raincoat and takes the umbrella and goes out. "Blair!" he calls. "John!" Then the shade on the office window goes up, where Anne has raised it and carried the desk lamp to the window and turned the light out-doors, and then he sees Blair, standing in the rain, without any hat, with his blue coat like it was put on him by a paper-hanger, with his face lifted toward Anne's window.

And here we are again: the bald husband, the rural plute, and this dashing blade, this home-wrecking poet. Both gentlemen, being artists: the one that doesn't want the other to get wet; the other whose conscience won't let him wreck the house from inside. Here we are, with Roger trying to hold one of these green silk, female umbrellas over himself and the poet too, jerking at the poet's arm.

"You damned fool! Come in the house!"

"No." His arm gives a little as Roger jerks at it, but the poet himself doesn't move.

"Do you want to drown? Come on, man!"

"No."

Roger jerks at the poet's arm, like jerking at the arm of a wet saw-dust doll. Then he begins to yell at the house: "Anne! Anne!"

"Did she say for me to come in?" the poet says.

"I—Yes. Yes. Come in the house. Are you mad?"

"You're lying," the poet says. "Let me alone."

"What are you trying to do?" Roger says. "You can't stand here like this."

"Yes I can. You go on in. You'll take cold."

Roger runs back to the house; they have an argument first, because Roger wants the poet to keep the umbrella and the poet won't do it. So Roger runs back to the house. Anne is at the door. "The fool," Roger says. "I can't——"

"Come in!" Anne calls. "John! Please!" But the poet has stepped out of the light and vanished. "John!" Anne calls. Then she began to laugh, staring at Roger from between her hair, brushing at her hair with her hands. "He—he looked so f—funny. He l—looked so——" Then she was not laughing and Roger had to hold her up. He carried her upstairs and put her to bed and sat with her until she could stop crying. Then he went back to the office. The lamp was still at the window, and when he moved it the light went across the lawn and he saw Blair again. He was sitting on the ground, with his back against a tree, his face raised in the rain toward Anne's window. Roger rushed out again, but when he got there, Blair was gone. Roger stood under the umbrella and called him for a while, but he never got any answer. Maybe he was going to try again to make the poet take the umbrella. So maybe he didn't know as much about poets as he thought he did. Or maybe he was thinking about Pope. Pope might have had an umbrella.

They never saw the poet again. This one, that is. Because this happened almost six months ago, and they still live there. But they never saw this one. Three days later, Anne gets the second letter, mailed from the village. It is a menu card from the Elite Cafe, or maybe they call it the Palace. It was already autographed by the flies that eat there, and the poet had written on the back of it. Anne left it on Roger's desk and went out, and then Roger read it.

It seems that this was the shot. The one that Roger had always claimed

to be waiting for. Anyway, the magazines that don't have any pictures took the poem, stealing it from one another while the interest or whatever it was ate up the money that the poet never got for it. But that was all right, too, because by that time Blair was dead.

Amos Crain's wife told them how the poet had left town. And a week later Anne left too. She went up to Connecticut to spend the rest of the summer with her mother and father, where the children were. The last thing she heard when she left the house was the typewriter.

But it was two weeks after Anne left before Roger finished it, wrote the last word. At first he wanted to put the poem in too, this poem on the menu card that wasn't about freedom, either, but he didn't. Conscience, maybe he called it, put over the old haymaker, and Roger took it standing, like a little man, and sent off the poem for the magazines to jaw over, and tied up the papers he had written and sent them off too. And what was it he had been writing? Him, and Anne, and the poet. Word for word, between the waiting spells to find out what to write down next, with a few changes here and there, of course, because live people do not make good copy, the most interesting copy being gossip, since it mostly is not true.

So he bundled the pages up and sent them off and they sent him the money. It came just in time, because the winter was coming and he still owed a balance on Blair's hospital and funeral. So he paid that, and with the rest of the money he bought Anne a fur coat and himself and the children some winter underwear.

Blair died in September. Anne and the children were still away when he got the wire, three or four days late, since the next batch of them had not arrived yet. So here he is, sitting at his desk, in the empty house, with the typewriting all finished, holding the wire in his hand. "Shelley," he says. "His whole life was a not very successful imitation of itself. Even to the amount of water it took."

He didn't tell Anne about the poet until after the fur coat came. "Did you see that he . . ." Anne said.

"Yes. He had a nice room, in the sun. A good nurse. The doctor didn't want him to have a special nurse at first. Damn butcher."

Sometimes when a man thinks about them making poets and artists and such pay these taxes which they say indicates that a man is free, twenty-one, and capable of taking care of himself in this close competition, it seems like

they are obtaining money under false pretences. Anyway, here's the rest of it, what they did next.

He reads the book, the story, to her, and her not saying anything until he had finished. "So that's what you were doing," she said.

He doesn't look at her, either; he is busy evening the pages, getting them smooth again. "It's your fur coat," he said.

"Oh," she says. "Yes. My fur coat."

So the fur coat comes. And what does she do then? She gave it away. Yes. Gave it to Mrs. Crain. Gave it to her, and her in the kitchen, churning, with her hair in her face, brushing her hair back with a wrist that looked like a lean ham. "Why, Miz Howes," she says. "I caint. I reely caint."

"You'll have to take it," Anne says. "We—I got it under false pretences. I don't deserve it. You put bread into the ground and reap it; I don't. So I can't wear a coat like this."

And they leave it there with Mrs. Crain and they go back home, walking. Only they stop in broad daylight, with Mrs. Crain watching them from the window, and go into a clinch on their own account. "I feel better," Anne says.

"So do I," Roger says. "Because Blair wasn't there to see Mrs. Crain's face when you gave her that coat. No freedom there, or equality either."

But Annie is not listening. "Not to think," she says, "that he . . . to dress me in the skins of little slain beasts. . . . You put him in a book, but you didn't finish it. You didn't know about that coat, did you? God beat you, that time, Roger."

"Ay," Roger says. "God beats me lots of times. But there's one thing about it. Their children are bigger than ours, and even Mrs. Crain can't wear my underclothes. So that's all right."

Sure. That was all right. Because it was Christmas soon, and then spring; and then summer, the long summer, the long days.

BIG BROTHER

by

John S. McNamara

I WAS sitting out on number five hatch making a pair of wooden bath slippers. All the real sailors had them, and I felt that by making myself a pair I would somehow become one of them. Besides, they're much better than ordinary bedroom slippers, because you can keep them on while you are taking your bath, and they will dry out as fast as your feet. They're not hard to make, consisting only of a wooden sole and a canvas strap to shove your toes through, but the piece of wood I was working on was hard and splintery, and I was not very handy with a knife and hatchet.

I was making a botch of it but still feeling quite nautical when Frank, the youngest of the three Spanish sailors, came along.

"What you make, Mac?" The American sailors called me Mac for short, but Frank pronounced it as if it were my whole name, and a very odd one.

I held up the piece I was working on. He snatched it out of my hand, laughed, and threw it over the side.

"Wait," he said, and disappeared into the forecastle, returning after a moment with a wooden packing box. Without saying a word, he began to tear the box apart in search of a suitable piece of wood. I handed him the hatchet, but he only laughed.

"I fix," he said, and went on tearing the box apart with his bare hands. There was really no need to hurry, but he worked like a maniac, it seemed to me, and finished the slippers in about twenty minutes.

"Here," he said, handing them to me. I tried not to notice the place where, in his haste, he had driven one of the nails crooked and split the wood.

"Thanks a lot, Frank. You work fast. It would take me all week."

"Sure, sure," he smiled, "I work fast."

We became very fond of one another. I can't say that we were friends, exactly, for that describes better my relationship with the three American sailors. There was equality there. They taught me how to steer, and I helped

them with their cross-word puzzles. They laughed at my jokes, and I laughed at theirs. But with Frank and me it was different. The relationship which he imposed was more like that of brothers, he being, although actually no older than I, the older brother. He was always more than willing to help me, and since I was unfamiliar with the work, and none too strong, I usually welcomed his assistance. At times his superior attitude piqued me a little, but my gratitude usually outweighed my vanity, and I was content to play the role which he had thrust upon me.

He never asked me to go ashore with him until one Sunday when we were tied up near Los Angeles. I had gone out the night before with the American sailors and had spent all of my draw.

"I haven't any money," I told him.

"I got money. We take a walk this afternoon."

"O.K., Frank, after dinner we'll take a walk."

"O.K., Mac." He laughed, as he always did when he repeated American slang.

After I had accepted, I began to think how funny it might look to be going ashore with Frank when I was broke, since I had never gone with him before, when I had money. I didn't want to impose upon him after all he had done for me, so I made a point of borrowing some money before we started out. All the American sailors were broke, of course, but I managed to get a dollar from the Third Assistant Engineer.

We took a trolley car to town. Frank paid both fares.

"Two," he said, pointing his thumb toward me.

When we got off the car at Long Beach, he turned abruptly into a drug store and stepped up to the soda fountain.

"Ice cream," he ordered, and then, "What you have, Mac?"

"Chocolate ice cream," I said. The boy brought us both chocolate.

Frank finished his ice cream, paid the clerk, and walked out as silently and abruptly as he had come in. I gulped my last spoonful and caught up with him.

"Say, Frank!"

I didn't know just how to put it.

"Frank, thanks for the ice cream, but you see, I borrowed some money from the Third, so we'll each pay our own way. All right?"

Perhaps it was just resentment at not being consulted, masquerading as

an unwillingness to sponge. I am not quite certain why I said it, or why Frank flared up at it.

I had read books of a person's face darkening in anger, but had always put it down as a mere literary convention devoid of any basis of truth. I knew now that there was truth behind it, for Frank's face actually turned to a darker color. He just threw words at me, all in a bunch.

"I say this morning, 'Mac, you come ashore with me.' 'No money,' you say. All right. 'I got money,' I say. I don't say, 'The Third give you money.' All right, I got money. I pay."

"All right, Frank. Sure."

We walked on for about five minutes. I was afraid to explain my position more clearly. The silence got on my nerves, but I didn't know how to break it. We came to the indoor swimming pool.

"You like swim?"

"Sure, Frank."

"You know how?"

"Sure." Around home everyone swims. We take it for granted.

"All right. Come."

Frank paid for both of us. The water was fine and clear, and the pool just the right temperature. I forgot Frank's surliness. I swam the length of the pool and back again as fast as I could, and then sat on the edge for a minute, kicking my feet in the water, while I got my breath.

There were three diving boards at different heights. I practiced a few jack-knifes on the lowest one and then started up the ladder to the second. Frank was right behind me. I made a pretty good dive. A higher board gives you more time to straighten out.

Just as I was coming up I heard a terrific splash. Frank had taken a belly-flopper, striking the water absolutely flat. He swam over to the other side of the board, ignoring me, and began climbing the ladder. He's a glutton for punishment, I thought, amused at his awkwardness, and at the same time admiring his courage. But when he continued up the ladder to the highest board, I began to see that he was motivated by something more than the love of the sport.

He stood at the end of the diving board for a moment and then threw himself off. It was as if someone had tossed a very heavy plank, not into the water, but on to the water. There was a sound just like a slap, only a hundred times louder.

He swam over, in his slow, old-fashioned side stroke, to where I was sitting.

"You go off the top, Mac?"

His skin was a flaming, stinging red.

"No, Frank, too high for me."

"Sure, sure," he smiled, "too high, Mac."

We dressed and took the trolley back to the docks. There is a clean, tired, relaxed feeling which you only get when you are riding back from the beach. The trolley car swayed slightly from side to side in a very restful rhythm.

"You feel good, Mac?"

"You bet. Thanks for taking me, Frank. It was fine. And thanks for the ice cream."

"Sure, sure. You like, Mac." And then, after a moment's silence, "What you call, Mac, the way you swim? Splash your feet."

"That's the Crawl."

"Crawl. You get tired too quick, Mac. I swim with my arms. No splash. Swim all day, no get tired."

"Yes, I get tired pretty quick, the way I swim."

"Sure, sure, Mac. You get tired quick."

The conductor came for his fares.

"Two," said Frank, pointing to me with his thumb.

He smiled at me as an older brother might, and I smiled back at him.

SONDERSHEIM

by

Linda Henly

THE first spasmodic puffs and jerks of the engine had given way to that even haunting motion of the train which would flow like a smooth undercurrent beneath her emerging thoughts. Remote as were those beloved holiday trips of her school days, in all the intervening years, whatever her destination, when she pulled the green curtains of her berth together, that motion of the train had never failed to evoke the old longing for Sondersheim. And now Julie was dead and Henry was old and dying and she was making one more pilgrimage. It would be her last.

She moved her hand in the dark across the face of the boy lying in the berth beside her and his lashes brushed her palm. This trip to Sondersheim was his adventure, too, and how he struggled with oblivion for every sharp breath of it.

They passed a suburban station and the lights flooded her berth. She thought of Ferd's face as it had looked from the train window out there in the smoky light of the platform at home. She realized that he had never sensed the depth of her attachment to Sondersheim, what a strange baffling distraction it had been in every relationship of her life, even in her love for him and the children. There had been days almost as far back as she could remember when she could have thrown over for it every other bond which claimed her. And from the first days of her intimacy with Ferd through all the years of their marriage there had always been this private haunt of her emotions, this sanctuary of her spirit to which even in moments when he must have thought she was unequivocably his, she would secretly withdraw. The thought flashed through her mind that perhaps Ferd had a spiritual retreat of his own from which she was cut off and she pushed the thought into the background of her consciousness where for the present she would not have to face it.

Henry and Julie had come into her life in that strange unquiet year when her mother had married a second time. Henry was a cousin of her

stepfather. They lived across the state just outside of Fairhill in their white house which they had named Sondersheim. They were part of that mysterious alien heritage which her stepfather had brought from the outside into the compass of intimate and familiar things. And in some strange and magical manner they had wound themselves into the fibre of her life.

The time was coming, she knew that, when the memory of it all would roll itself out before her and she would be able to look at it and perhaps even talk about it to Ferd. But now it was like those flashes of light ouside the train window receding back there somewhere in the darkness through which she and her boy were speeding. If she closed her eyes she knew how they would flare up for her. . . .

The small warm body lay slack beside her; the lashes flat and still against the cheeks. If she closed her eyes. . . .

A late afternoon in the Christmas week of her first holiday at Sondersheim. She is a little girl in a bright blue cashmere dress with a square cream-colored yoke trimmed in rows and rows of bright yellow braid. A thick brown plait is tugging slightly at the back of her neck as she stands before the wash-stand in her room washing her cold red hands with a smooth round cake of oily sweet-smelling soap. Outside in the gray shadowless light the snow is falling in big flakes, aimless and far apart. As she dries her hands at the window, she can still see her own patternless footprints and the giant white ball she has just rolled out of the wet clean snow. She knows that Henry will soon be home to see it, for she can hear Julie in the next room pulling down the blinds and lighting the gas lights.

Presently, Julie comes in with a long white taper to light the light high over her bureau. Julie asks her if she may brush her hair and braid it for her. And as she sits there before the bureau with a towel around her shoulders, she can see in the mirror under the jerky flame her own small red face above the choker collar of the light yoke of her blue dress and, over it, Julie's pale handsome face and her smooth pompadour of blond hair and her white hands gently brushing and stroking the long straight brown strands. The house seems very still to her now and suddenly she feels lonely and yet strangely happy and not at all eager to be home where things are familiar and clear.

After a while she hears Henry's key in the front door and his footsteps in the hall and the pause while he hangs up his hat and coat and then his

footsteps on the stairs. He is stopping to look in at the door. In the mirror she can see Julie dropping her eyes as if she were guilty of something while he stands at the threshold watching them with his head almost touching the top of the frame and one shoulder drooping a little. Suddenly his large soft russet eyes begin to glow, he cocks his head to the side, strokes his little gray goatee, and solemnly recites the German rhyme from *Snowdrop and the Seven Dwarves:*

"Spieg'lein, Spieg'lein auf der Wand,
Wer ist die Schönste in dem Land?"

Julie smiles gravely.

She finds herself wondering if they will have cake for dessert and whether she can keep it from crumbling all up in her fingers under Julie's grave eyes. And when Henry laughingly alludes to the big snowball outdoors it seems to her that a spell is broken.

That night when she goes to bed she leaves her hair all open and spread out on her pillow and she wishes that Henry would come in and kiss her goodnight.

A warm summer's day—the last of a month's holiday at Sondersheim. They have been picnicking on Laurel Mountain and are coming down on the mountain trolley. They are going very fast. She is sitting between Henry and Julie. The wind is blowing in her face and the foliage of the trees which lines the tracks sweeps against the sides of the car. She holds her breath at the sharp swiftness of the descent but feels safe with Henry and Julie there so close to her. Suddenly she is aware of the clutch of Julie's hand on her thigh. When she looks up into her face and sees that it is tense with fright, she slips her arm reassuringly across her shoulders so that the fine dots of Julie's white dotted-Swiss dress prick the smooth skin of her forearm. It is a short ride and as the road flattens out Julie's grip on her thigh relaxes. She looks up at Henry. He smiles back at her. "It's all right, Kamerad, you and I, we have to look after her."

The words fill her with rapture and she wishes that they could go speeding on forever.

They reach Sondersheim in the magical pellucid light of the twilight and it seems to her watching Julie walk through the tall iron gate and up the

gravel path with her skirts trailing full and limp, it seems to her that the white stone house behind the dark maples is a charmed dwelling, and that Henry and Julie are bound to it by some thread which she cannot see. She loses the sweet warm sense of being one of them which she felt on the mountain trolley, and they seem to her like actors on a stage or figures in a picture.

Inside the familiar things seem real again, and dear as always. She romps for a time with Fritz, the fox-terrier, and then they have supper on the porch and watch the shadows make soft shifting purple shapes on the green pied slopes of Laurel Mountain. Afterward, in the music room Henry plays little tunes of his own for her on his zither and then a duet with Julie on the piano. Standing beside Henry who sits tall and straight like a soldier, she matches the swift, masterful play of his hands with the prancing notes on the sheet in front of him, and at his confirming nod, she proudly turns the pages of the music as if she were turning them for a king and a queen.

And then she plays a game of cribbage with Julie while Henry reads the evening paper under the lamplight. Now and then she steals a glance at Henry. With his eyes cast down so that she can't see them, his face looks stern, not like her father's, but austere like the face of a Greek statue. When the grandfather's clock on the stairs strikes nine, Maria, the German housekeeper brings in a tray with beer on it for Henry and gingerale for Julie and for her. Under the glasses are little rounds of green felt with pictures of Henry's brewery on them. The three of them seem very close to each other now as they sit there in the circle of low lamplight shading off into the friendly darkness where she can distinguish the dim shapes of the bookshelves and the pictures on the wall.

While Henry locks the doors and windows, she takes the tray to the pantry and then kisses Julie good-night in the hall. Looking over Julie's shoulder, she can see the picture of Henry's old orchestra on the wall—the big frame with the large oval inset of Henry in the middle and all the small oval insets of the members grouped around him. She is just turning away when Julie pulls her back and kisses her on the forehead, presses both hands against her cheeks, and calls her a sweet child. She flushes at the sound of her own little childish embarrassed laugh and feels relieved when Henry calls her to the door to look at the fireflies. There are myriads of them studding the black night with their wee flickering lights.

The next morning as she walks down the terraced slope behind the house to Julie in the rose garden, the sweet smell of a clump of white phlox

brings tears to her eyes so that when Julie hands her the roses to take home, she feels awkward and speechless.

On the train home she worries about the way she laughed the night before when Julie called her a sweet child.

A Saturday afternoon in mid-winter at the Opera. On the right arm of her chair lies Julie's left hand with its pearl ring above the wedding ring. Behind her on the back of the seat when she leans against it she can feel Henry's arm along her shoulders reaching over now and then to pat Julie; and out of the tail of her eye she can see Julie's grave little smile of response.

The lights in the big crystal chandelier are going out, tier by tier. As the red velvet curtain rises on the last act of *The Juggler of Notre Dame,* she hears in the distance the monks' song to the Virgin. There is the little chapel of the Abbey with its painted statue of the Virgin on the altar and the painter-monk standing before it. Now he is slipping behind one of the columns, as the Juggler with his viol and balls and hoops approaches the altar, takes off his monk's robe, and spreads his carpet before the Virgin. Now he is carrying his cup to the imaginary spectators. Now he is singing the old French Pastoral which Henry played for her at home. Now the monks are arriving, whispering, dumbfounded, held back by old Boniface, the cook. Now the Juggler is beginning to dance. Faster and faster his feet fly before the scandalized monks until, prostrate, he falls at the feet of the Virgin. Now the miracle. The face of the Virgin lights up with a smile as she reaches her hand in blessing over the Juggler. The angels are singing Hosannah. The Virgin is suffused in light, and a nimbus lights up the head of the Juggler as he dies in the arm of the prior who chants, *"Heureux les simples, car ils verront Dieux."*

Driving home in the snow, they stop at a little French ice-cream parlor. Henry and Julie have coffee and fancy cakes. She chooses a *meringue glacé* filled with frozen custard and topped with whipped cream and citron. Henry chuckles at her delight in its magnificence. *"Heureux les simples, car ils verront Dieux,"* he echoes. "Happy are the simple for they shall see God."

Suddenly she notices that there are tears in Julie's eyes and then everything becomes solemn.

She is pushing against the revolving door of St. Anne's hospital, breathing a long deep breath of the cold night air to brace her against that ominous

smell which will confront her on the other side of the glass.

The oak bench under the clock is vacant so that she can sit there opposite the elevator and watch the hand on the dial mark the floors as it glides up and down. A sister in black rustles past her in a business-like way. The hand on the dial completes a semi-circle from 6 to 1, and the gate clicks to discharge a narrow stretcher on wheels with the contour of a human body under the mound of white sheets. She is thinking that if this body is alive perhaps its only desire is to live. And O how manifold and complex are her own desires! She had always taken life for granted until Julie underwent this operation.

The hand on the dial is pausing at 5. Then as the elevator glides into view she recognizes Henry's large hand—the one with the scar—holding his gray soft hat, and then the drooping shoulders, and then the face, lined and worried. He smiles at her gratefully and they pass out silently through the revolving door into the cab which waits every night for Henry.

As they approach her home where Henry is staying until Julie can be taken back to Sondersheim, she begins to dread the incongruity of the light and the cheer and the household going on as usual.

A gleaming white July morning at the seashore. It is her eighteenth birthday. Henry and Julie are staying at the hotel. Ferd is coming down in the afternoon. There were gay plans for a fishing party in the bay but she has broken them up because Julie is not well enough to come along. Her mother is annoyed and her father angry in his cold way. It occurs to her that they are jealous of Henry and Julie.

Whistling, she walks down to the beach in her bathing suit. The hot asphalt burns the soles of her feet and on the dunes the stiff sand grass whips and stings her legs. The tide is going out when she jumps over the breakwater wall and the cold resilience of the damp sand sends her running down the beach. Out of the tonal background of pulsating surf the murmur of voices begins to emerge as she approaches the hotel and then the raucous notes of the brass band playing the *Rienzi* Overture out on the ocean pier. Henry and Julie are sitting in steamer chairs apart from the crowd as always. Henry is looking out over the water, his right elbow rests on the arm of his chair, and the uplifted hand is gently beating time. He scalded that hand in a brewing vat when he was a boy and the taut skin draws back the second

finger a little. Julie is sitting beside him gravely sewing. She has a fancy when she sees her that Julie is a lark turned nightingale.

"We thought you were fishing," Julie is saying.

"We didn't go." She knows she is blushing.

"But your birthday and all the preparations?"

Henry is drawing her down on the arm of his chair. "Shall we go bathing?"

How grateful to him she is! And as he strokes her hand she thinks of how he will take her out beyond the breakers to the life boat where she loves to go and how she will brace herself on his arms when the high swells come.

Going home she remembers how cold her father's eyes had turned as she went off to the beach whistling defiance. Her body, buoyant and rhythmic as the waves, goes suddenly heavy and inert. And then just as she turns the corner and can see the pink hydrangeas on the front lawn, she remembers that Julie has invited her to go back with them to Sondersheim. . . .

That night as she walks home from the pier with Ferd, the heavy salt mist from the ocean breaks up the lights along the boardwalk so that they look like fiery yellow crosses hanging over the sea. As the crowd thins and the human din grows faint the heavy boom of the surf begins to emerge; and counter to its impersonal cosmic rhythm beats reassuringly the intimate, gentle thud of their footsteps on the fog-soaked planks. The tide is high and when they turn into the street at the breakwater wall, the wave curling up upon its incurving surface tosses the white foam into their faces.

At home on the hall table under the gas chandelier her mother has left a tray with lemonade and cookies. As Ferd sits there quietly beside her sipping his lemonade, she hardly knows whether she wants the night, so taut and quivering, to close in vibrant expectancy or to carry with it an overt meaning.

After a while Ferd picks up his hat to go. In the vestibule as she puts her hand on the knob of the door to open it for him, he touches her forearm and she feels his hand trembling. At the same time her eyes fall on the amber handle of an umbrella which belongs to Julie. She thinks of Sondersheim. She sees the iron railing of the balcony as it will look from her bed with the petunias climbing over it and the maple trees behind it. She feels the cool linen sheets on her arms and she remembers the wistful look in Henry's eyes out there in the water when she braced herself on his arms. And then she looks up at Ferd standing there in the dim light of the vestibule with his

straw hat in his hand. He isn't seeing that she is no longer with him. He pushes her against the door, forces her head back so that her neck hurts, and kisses her. She lets it go at that.

She is sitting on the little low sofa in her room at Sondersheim. Julie is in the next room dying of cancer. Henry comes now and then and sits beside her on the sofa. All the austerity is gone out of his face; the softness of his eyes diffuses it entirely. At midnight he leaves her for a long time. The grandfather's clock on the stairs chimes the quarter hours while she sits there tracing the outlines of the cretonne flowers on the sofa, thinking that perhaps Julie's spirit from its lonely secret height is looking gratefully upon death. And then she wonders what Henry will do after Julie is dead and she is a little excited at the thought that soon she will be all that is left to him. She wishes that she could come here to Sondersheim to stay with him. And then she thinks of Ferd and wonders whether some day they will marry.

The grandfather's clock is striking five when Henry comes back into the room. The light is gone out of his face and she knows that Julie is dead. She follows him downstairs to his Turkish rocker in the bay window, and as she covers him gently with his robe, his tears drop hot on her hand. When daylight slowly filters in through the half-open slats of the Venetian blinds, the familiar objects of the room, which she thought she knew so well, emerge and take shape with all the clarity of strangeness.

A winter's night at Sondersheim. She is sitting on the sofa in the library. On her hand she can feel the hot breath of the fox terrier asleep on his pillow beside her. Behind her on the other side of the portiers, she can hear Maria rolling the sweeper over the floor and setting the dining room chairs straight. Henry is sitting beside the library table with all the old friendly things around him. He is an old man now and she is alive to all that separates him from her. Mentally he lives in a different world. If he knew her ideas about some things, how concerned he would be! And yet, old as he is and old-fashioned as he seems to her, there is still something luminous and undying in his face. And as he sits there in the quiet night, she feels the same rapture, the same fullness of heart in his presence which she felt as a child.

The moment is suspended there in silence, like ripe fruit, too lovely to pluck. The thing which she has come to Sondersheim to tell him will not mount to her lips.

Presently he raises his head. His brown eyes are warm and soft. "Well, Kamerad, what is it?"

She smiles at his intuition. "I'm going to marry Ferd," she is saying.

He waits, and then: "You ought to be happy, you two."

Her imagination leaps to his sense of exclusion and she thinks suddenly of Julie. She walks over to the window. The ice-covered maples glisten to irridescence under the headlights of an automobile as it mounts the hill. He comes and stands beside her. She feels his large hand on her shoulder. For a long time they stand there beating back the currents of the past until the night has wrapped them round again.

Upstairs in her room, when she gets into bed, Henry's slow footsteps pass her door. They are heavy with human weariness and it comes over her that one day Sondersheim will not be. And it seems to her then that she will never love another place as she has loved this one. It seems to her that in it flow the springs of her being; that here did life's implications first confront her; that here did she first feel the power of personality and the hazard of human relationships and the ultimate loneliness of people.

It is very dark but she can feel the presence of all the things the house holds and, outside, the ice-covered maples and the dark bulk of Laurel Mountain to the West.

* * *

She got off the train and turned to lift down the small straining figure in dark blue coat and tam o'shanter smiling so expectantly at her. They walked down the platform of that ugly station the lineaments of which sickened her a little in their familiarity: the narrow ticket-window; the bleak benches; the grade crossing; the row of miscellaneous and dilapidated cabs; the sordid waiting room filled with drab and formless people. They went inside to arrange her hair under her hat. Henry was to see it bobbed for the first time. She pushed the boy's brown curls under his tam so that a white forehead would show above glowing cheeks. He was the loveliest of her children. She had taken them all on these pilgrimages.

She led the boy by a warm confiding hand into one of the cabs. They passed landmarks: the terra cotta front of the auditorium, now a skating rink, where Henry had told her he once conducted the Männerchor concerts; the barber pole in front of the brick house with the white marble steps where he had lived during some of those blurred years before she had known

him, before she was born; that other more pretentious brownstone house opposite the park where he and Julie had lived while they were building Sondersheim; up the last steep hill to the iron gate with the proud letters of Sondersheim. The maple trees were still exultant over a defeated lawn.

She turned the iron knob of the gate and pressed her body against it knowing just where it would yield. She was aware of the boy's shoes crunching in the gravel beside her. Sondersheim lay beckoning before him—a shining new page; while for her—dark and brimming, it awaited a last jealous word. If only she could somehow brand him with its magic for her so that he could carry this part of her on into the future!

She rang the bell. A cousin of Henry's whom she had never seen opened the door. She was tall and white and rigid. "You will be shocked when you see him. He has changed."

She braced herself. A phantom throng blotted reality out for a minute. A fox terrier barked at her heels. She came out of her trance. There had always been fox terriers. A succession of them.

She led the boy into the library. Henry was sitting in the black Turkish rocker in the bay window with the Venetian blinds half-drawn. Was he so different after all as he leaned forward to kiss her? The same warm look out of brown eyes that belied the austerity of forehead and chin. He searched the boy's face and smiled whimsically just as he had years ago when he used to call her his Kamerad.

They went upstairs to take off their wraps. She found herself acting as if the minutes to which she wanted to cling so desperately didn't count at all. It was because she was such a coward and couldn't face the passing of this thing which had sent its roots so deep into her life. The boy chattered while she cast furtive glances at friendly inanimate things which she couldn't bear to look at, knowing it meant parting with them.

She ran lightly down the steps as if it could be done every day, shrinking from the sight and the touch of the grandfather's clock as she brushed past it at the bend and catching her breath at the familiar curve of the staircase. The door to the music room was open as she passed it and she felt the presence behind her of the grand piano and the shelves of music built into the wall. The sudden memory of a little Dresden china lady on the top shelf of the teakwood cabinet made her dizzy and she welcomed the sight of Maria who still treated her as if she were a child.

And then she sat down on the stool at Henry's feet and talked glibly

of the autumn hillsides they had passed on the train, and a symphony concert she had heard the week before, and Ferd, and the other children at home. She half explained why she had been slow in answering a letter and said nothing of the days when she had wanted to jump on a train for a few of these moments which were passing out like dry leaves before an unseen flame. When luncheon was announced she watched him for the first time stoop over a cane as if that were the way he had always walked, he who had been a six-foot captain in the Northern army at nineteen.

After luncheon she took the boy upstairs for a nap. The cretonne flowers on the sofa looked faded in the autumn sunlight and as she raised the window she noticed that the petunias in the box on the balcony were drying up. She sat down on the sofa to make sure the boy would let himself drop off to sleep. Quietly she sat there and watched him. Over his head on the wooden panel of the bed in a black paste partout frame hung a little device she had once laboriously made for Julie:

Sleep sweet within this quiet room;
My guest, whoe'er thou art,
And let no mournful yesterdays
Disturb thy peaceful heart.

Around the words was a border of nodding red poppies. She remembered how Julie had smiled her grave smile and had said she would put it in the one place where she was sure there were no mournful yesterdays to disturb a peaceful heart. And there it still hung on her bed in the guest room—the trite little verse in its childish frame. And now her own boy lay under it, unconcerned with the nice continuity of it all and unconscious of the memory, mournful or gay, which was even then shaping itself in some remote corner of his brain against a day when he, too, would look back.

When she was sure the boy was asleep she walked over to the mirror and ran the old comb with the silver back through her hair taking in, with her hungry glance, the silver-backed brush and the long-handled silver mirror, and the bone button hook, and the yellow silk sunflower pincushion, and the little cornucopia hair-receiver hanging on the side of the mirror, remembering the gesture with which Julie used to run the silver comb through the silver brush and wrap the little wad of brown hair round her finger and neatly deposit it in the china horn.

And then as she turned to go downstairs, Henry's cousin walked into the room and stood by the bed looking at the sleeping boy. "Henry thinks this child looks more like you than the others," she mused. "Henry has always been very fond of you, hasn't he? I suppose it's because when he first knew you, you were close to the age of his own child when she . . . when she died. Julie would never have a child of her own after what happened, and of course it was right, wasn't it, that she shouldn't? It was only a sort of retribution for what she had driven Henry's first wife to. I was a baby when it happened but later when my mother told me the story, I used to see his first wife in my dreams tying the weight round the little girl's neck and then walking right down into the river with her. I used to imagine that I had been the person standing on the bridge who had seen it happen and that I got down to them in time to save them. For a long time I used to hate Julie. I thought the people here in the town were right for not having anything to do with them. You know Henry had been such a figure in the town—organized the orchestra and led the Männerchor and all that. Mother said two mounted policemen had to escort him to the funeral of his own wife and child. I never understood how Julie had the courage to marry him. You know the first wife left a note blaming her for everything. Of course they both paid heavily for what they did, not having any children or friends all those years. Mother knew Julie when she was a girl and she said you wouldn't have known her for the same person, so high-spirited and gay she was then. When I was older and knew more about life I used to feel a little sorry for her, didn't you?"

Down deep into the unguarded pool of her mind, dropped the unsuspecting words of Henry's cousin, while she stood there at the foot of the bed in which her boy was sleeping, her hands clutching the footboard, her knees pressed against it, and the nerves of her legs vibrating like violin strings. After a while she turned to the bureau and began rearranging the things on it: the silver comb, and the silver brush, and the long-handled silver mirror, and the bone button hook, and the yellow silk sunflower pin-cushion, until at last the falling words found the deep bed of her mind and sank into it forever. "Yes," she heard herself saying, "I, too, felt sorry for Julie. Once when I was a girl I had a fancy that she was a lark turned into a nightingale. Shall I go downstairs to Henry now?"

Downstairs, as she walked toward Henry sitting in the bay window of the library, she had an odd sense of being a little girl again, but instead of

facing a future strange and unknown, she seemed to see days ahead which were known and certain and beloved. It was the same with the things in the room; she seemed to be seeing them for the first time and yet they were vested with all the dear associations of the past.

She sat down on the stool and played with the fringe on Henry's robe. He asked her if the boy were musical and what instrument she would have him learn. He spoke of the joy his music had been to him and how greatly it had enriched his life. And then he advised her in his practical way never to allow any of the children to become professional musicians; there were too many hazards.

Sometimes he winced with the pain in his back and then shook his head as if to beg her not to notice it. Soon they lapsed into silence with memories hanging over them and the imminence of separation. She wondered what life would be like there where she lived without Henry in it here in Sondersheim. When she felt the weight of his hand on her knee, she placed hers over it, and the taut skin of that old scar of his boyhood lay smooth and cool beneath her palm until the boy awoke and called her. She brought him down and he played, a little sleepily, with a giant box of stone blocks (a characteristically lavish gift) until it was time to call a cab to take them to the train.

Upstairs for her wraps she took in once more fearfully and swiftly the dear familiar things up there. In Julie's room she stopped for a minute at the window and looked out at Laurel Mountain where as a child she had gone picnicking. It was purple in the dusk with warm soft contours. And in her own room she stood again at the foot of the bed in which her boy had just been sleeping and in which long ago she had once spread her hair out on the pillow and wished that Henry would come in and kiss her good-night.

Downstairs when she leaned over to kiss him, Henry murmured something about if this were the last time. The boy was shouting excitedly that the cab had come. She called him back to say good-bye. He was radiant with the swiftness of the day's adventure. They started out of the room. She was hearing herself say good-bye to Henry's cousin in the vestibule. And then she found herself in the cab not daring to look back at the house.

On the train she was grateful for the gray neutrality of the dusk. And as darkness overtook them and the familiar panorama of the winding river gave way to the reflected lights of the train in the window, she thought of

the secret which all these years Sondersheim had managed to keep from her. She thought of that dim unknown creature out of the blurred past who must once have looked expectantly upon life and who had walked, broken hearted, into unfriendly waters with her child. She thought of Julíe who should have soared high and free and blithe over sunny lanes of apple blossoms and who had languished beside still water under drooping willow trees. And she thought of Henry who was made to dispense life and laughter and music, and who had brought death and sadness. And then she thought of her boy sitting there, with his knees crossed so jauntily, beside her.

THE GILDED SIX-BITS

by

Zora Neale Hurston

IT was a Negro yard around a Negro house in a Negro settlement that looked to the payroll of the G and G Fertilizer works for its support.

But there was something happy about the place. The front yard was parted in the middle by a sidewalk from gate to door-step, a sidewalk edged on either side by quart bottles driven neck down into the ground on a slant. A mess of homey flowers planted without a plan but blooming cheerily from their helter-skelter places. The fence and house were whitewashed. The porch and steps scrubbed white.

The front door stood open to the sunshine so that the floor of the front room could finish drying after its weekly scouring. It was Saturday. Everything clean from the front gate to the privy house. Yard raked so that the strokes of the rake would make a pattern. Fresh newspaper cut in fancy edge on the kitchen shelves.

Missie May was bathing herself in the galvanized washtub in the bedroom. Her dark-brown skin glistened under the soapsuds that skittered down from her wash rag. Her stiff young breasts thrust forward aggressively like broad-based cones with the tips lacquered in black.

She heard men's voices in the distance and glanced at the dollar clock on the dresser.

"Humph! Ah'm way behind time t'day! Joe gointer be heah 'fore Ah git mah clothes on if Ah don't make haste."

She grabbed the clean meal sack at hand and dried herself hurriedly and began to dress. But before she could tie her slippers, there came the ring of singing metal on wood. Nine times.

Missie May grinned with delight. She had not seen the big tall man come stealing in the gate and creep up the walk grinning happily at the joyful mischief he was about to commit. But she knew that it was her husband throwing silver dollars in the door for her to pick up and pile beside her

plate at dinner. It was this way every Saturday afternoon. The nine dollars hurled into the open door, he scurried to a hiding place behind the cape jasmine bush and waited.

Missie May promptly appeared at the door in mock alarm.

"Who dat chunkin' money in mah do'way?" she demanded. No answer from the yard. She leaped off the porch and began to search the shrubbery. She peeped under the porch and hung over the gate to look up and down the road. While she did this, the man behind the jasmine darted to the china berry tree. She spied him and gave chase.

"Nobody ain't gointer be chunkin' money at me and Ah not do 'em nothin'," she shouted in mock anger. He ran around the house with Missie May at his heels. She overtook him at the kitchen door. He ran inside but could not close it after him before she crowded in and locked with him in a rough and tumble. For several minutes the two were a furious mass of male and female energy. Shouting, laughing, twisting, turning, tussling, tickling each other in the ribs; Missie May clutching onto Joe and Joe trying, but not too hard, to get away.

"Missie May, take yo' hand out mah pocket!" Joe shouted out between laughs.

"Ah ain't, Joe, not lessen you gwine gimme whateve' it is good you got in yo' pocket. Turn it go, Joe, do Ah'll tear yo' clothes."

"Go on tear 'em. You de one dat pushes de needles round heah. Move yo' hand Missie May."

"Lemme git dat paper sack out yo' pocket. Ah bet its candy kisses."

"Tain't. Move yo' hand. Woman ain't got no business in a man's clothes nohow. Go way."

Missie May gouged way down and gave an upward jerk and triumphed.

"Unhhunh! Ah got it. It 'tis so candy kisses. Ah knowed you had somethin' for me in yo' clothes. Now Ah got to see whut's in every pocket you got."

Joe smiled indulgently and let his wife go through all of his pockets and take out the things that he had hidden there for her to find. She bore off the chewing gum, the cake of sweet soap, the pocket handkerchief as if she had wrested them from him, as if they had not been bought for the sake of this friendly battle.

"Whew! dat play-fight done got me all warmed up." Joe exclaimed. "Got me some water in de kittle?"

"Yo' water is on de fire and yo' clean things is cross de bed. Hurry up

and wash yo'self and git changed so we kin eat. Ah'm hongry." As Missie said this, she bore the steaming kettle into the bedroom.

"You ain't hongry, sugar," Joe contradicted her. "Youse jes' a little empty. Ah'm de one whut's hongry. Ah could eat up camp meetin', back off 'ssociation, and drink Jurdan dry. Have it on de table when Ah git out de tub."

"Don't you mess wid mah business, man. You git in yo' clothes. Ah'm a real wife, not no dress and breath. Ah might not look lak one, but if you burn me, you won't git a thing but wife ashes."

Joe splashed in the bedroom and Missie May fanned around in the kitchen. A fresh red and white checked cloth on the table. Big pitcher of buttermilk beaded with pale drops of butter from the churn. Hot fried mullet, crackling bread, ham hock atop a mound of string beans and new potatoes, and perched on the window-sill a pone of spicy potato pudding.

Very little talk during the meal but that little consisted of banter that pretended to deny affection but in reality flaunted it. Like when Missie May reached for a second helping of the tater pone. Joe snatched it out of her reach.

After Missie May had made two or three unsuccesstul grabs at the pan, she begged, "Aw, Joe gimme some mo' dat tater pone."

"Nope, sweetenin' is for us men-folks. Y'all purty lil frail eels don't need nothin' lak dis. You too sweet already."

"Please, Joe."

"Naw, naw. Ah don't want you to git no sweeter than whut you is already. We goin' down de road a lil piece t'night so you go put on yo' Sunday-go-to-meetin' things."

Missie May looked at her husband to see if he was playing some prank. "Sho nuff, Joe?"

"Yeah. We goin' to de ice cream parlor."

"Where de ice cream parlor at, Joe?"

"A new man done come heah from Chicago and he done got a place and took and opened it up for a ice cream parlor, and bein' as it's real swell, Ah wants you to be one de first ladies to walk in dere and have some set down."

"Do Jesus, Ah ain't knowed nothin' 'bout it. Who de man done it?"

"Mister Otis D. Slemmons, of spots and places—Memphis, Chicago, Jacksonville, Philadelphia and so on."

"Dat heavy-set man wid his mouth full of gold teethes?"

"Yeah. Where did you see 'im at?"

"Ah went down to de sto' tuh git a box of lye and Ah seen 'im standin' on de corner talkin' to some of de mens, and Ah come on back and went to scrubbin' de floor, and he passed and tipped his hat whilst Ah was scourin' de steps. Ah thought Ah never seen *him* befo'."

Joe smiled pleasantly. "Yeah, he's up to date. He got de finest clothes Ah ever seen on a colored man's back."

"Aw, he don't look no better in his clothes than you do in yourn. He got a puzzlegut on 'im and he so chuckle-headed, he got a pone behind his neck."

Joe looked down at his own abdomen and said wistfully, "Wisht Ah had a build on me lak he got. He ain't puzzle-gutted, honey. He jes' got a corperation. Dat make 'm look lak a rich white man. All rich mens is got some belly on 'em."

"Ah seen de pitchers of Henry Ford and he's a spare-built man and Rockefeller look lak he ain't got but one gut. But Ford and Rockefeller and dis Slemmons and all de rest kin be as many-gutted as dey please, Ah'm satisfied wid you jes' lak you is, baby. God took pattern after a pine tree and built you noble. Youse a pritty man, and if Ah knowed any way to make you mo' pritty still Ah'd take and do it."

Joe reached over gently and toyed with Missie May's ear. "You jes' say dat cause you love me, but Ah know Ah can't hold no light to Otis D. Slemmons. Ah ain't never been nowhere and Ah ain't got nothin' but you."

Missie May got on his lap and kissed him and he kissed back in kind. Then he went on. "All de womens is crazy 'bout 'im everywhere he go."

"How you know dat, Joe?"

"He tole us so hisself."

"Dat don't make it so. His mouf is cut cross-ways, ain't it? Well, he kin lie jes' lak anybody else."

"Good Lawd, Missie! You womens sho is hard to sense into things. He's got a five-dollar gold piece for a stick-pin and he got a ten-dollar gold piece on his watch chain and his mouf is jes' crammed full of gold teethes. Sho wisht it wuz mine. And whut make it so cool, he got money 'cumulated. And womens give it all to 'im."

"Ah don't see whut de womens see on 'im. Ah wouldn't give 'im a wink if de sheriff wuz after 'im."

"Well, he tole us how de white womens in Chicago give 'im all dat gold money. So he don't 'low nobody to touch it at all. Not even put dey

finger on it. Dey tole 'im not to. You kin make 'miration at it, but don't tetch it."

"Whyn't he stay up dere where dey so crazy 'bout 'im?"

"Ah reckon dey done made 'im vast-rich and he wants to travel some. He say dey wouldn't leave 'im hit a lick of work. He got mo' lady people crazy 'bout him than he kin shake a stick at."

"Joe, Ah hates to see you so dumb. Dat stray nigger jes' tell y'all anything and y'all b'lieve it."

"Go 'head on now, honey and put on yo' clothes. He talkin' 'bout his pritty womens—Ah want 'im to see *mine.*"

Missie May went off to dress and Joe spent the time trying to make his stomach punch out like Slemmons' middle. He tried the rolling swagger of the stranger, but found that his tall bone-and-muscle stride fitted ill with it. He just had time to drop back into his seat before Missie May came in dressed to go.

On the way home that night Joe was exultant. "Didn't Ah say ole Otis was swell? Can't he talk Chicago talk? Wuzn't dat funny whut he said when great big fat ole Ida Armstrong come in? He asted me, 'Who is dat broad wid de forte shake?' Dat's a new word. Us always thought forty was a set of figgers but he showed us where it means a whole heap of things. Sometimes he don't say forty, he jes' say thirty-eight and two and dat mean de same thing. Know whut he tole me when Ah wuz payin' for our ice cream? He say, 'Ah have to hand it to you, Joe. Dat wife of yours is jes' thirty-eight and two. Yessuh, she's forte!' Ain't he killin'?"

"He'll do in case of a rush. But he sho is got uh heap uh gold on 'im. Dat's de first time Ah ever seed gold money. It lookted good on him sho nuff, but it'd look a whole heap better on you."

"Who, me? Missie May youse crazy! Where would a po' man lak me git gold money from?"

Missie May was silent for a minute, then she said, "Us might find some goin' long de road some time. Us could."

"Who would be losin' gold money round heah? We ain't even seen none dese white folks wearin' no gold money on dey watch chain. You must be figgerin' Mister Packard or Mister Cadillac goin' pass through heah."

"You don't know whut been lost 'round heah. Maybe somebody way back in memorial times lost they gold money and went on off and it ain't

never been found. And then if we wuz to find it, you could wear some 'thout havin' no gang of womens lak dat Slemmons say he got."

Joe laughed and hugged her. "Don't be so wishful 'bout me. Ah'm satisfied de way Ah is. So long as Ah be yo' husband, Ah don't keer 'bout nothin' else. Ah'd ruther all de other womens in de world to be dead than for you to have de toothache. Less we go to bed and git our night rest."

It was Saturday night once more before Joe could parade his wife in Slemmons' ice cream parlor again. He worked the night shift and Saturday was his only night off. Every other evening around six o'clock he left home, and dying dawn saw him hustling home around the lake where the challenging sun flung a flaming sword from east to west across the trembling water.

That was the best part of life—going home to Missie May. Their whitewashed house, the mock battle on Saturday, the dinner and ice cream parlor afterwards, church on Sunday nights when Missie out-dressed any woman in town—all, everything was right.

One night around eleven the acid ran out at the G. and G. The foreman knocked off the crew and let the steam die down. As Joe rounded the lake on his way home, a lean moon rode the lake in a silver boat. If anybody had asked Joe about the moon on the lake, he would have said he hadn't paid it any attention. But he saw it with his feelings. It made him yearn painfully for Missie. Creation obsessed him. He thought about children. They had been married more than a year now. They had money put away. They ought to be making little feet for shoes. A little boy child would be about right.

He saw a dim light in the bedroom and decided to come in through the kitchen door. He could wash the fertilizer dust off himself before presenting himself to Missie May. It would be nice for her not to know that he was there until he slipped into his place in bed and hugged her back. She always liked that.

He eased the kitchen door open slowly and silently, but when he went to set his dinner bucket on the table he bumped it into a pile of dishes, and something crashed to the floor. He heard his wife gasp in fright and hurried to reassure her.

"Iss me, honey. Don't git skeered."

There was a quick, large movement in the bedroom. A rustle, a thud, and a stealthy silence. The light went out.

What? Robbers? Murderers? Some varmint attacking his helpless wife,

perhaps. He struck a match, threw himself on guard and stepped over the door-sill into the bedroom.

The great belt on the wheel of Time slipped and eternity stood still. By the match light he could see the man's legs fighting with his breeches in his frantic desire to get them on. He had both chance and time to kill the intruder in his helpless condition—half in and half out of his pants—but he was too weak to take action. The shapeless enemies of humanity that live in the hours of Time had waylaid Joe. He was assaulted in his weakness. Like Samson awakening after his haircut. So he just opened his mouth and laughed.

The match went out and he struck another and lit the lamp. A howling wind raced across his heart, but underneath its fury he heard his wife sobbing and Slemmons pleading for his life. Offering to buy it with all that he had. "Please, suh, don't kill me. Sixty-two dollars at de sto'. Gold money."

Joe just stood. Slemmons looked at the window, but it was screened. Joe stood out like a rough-backed mountain between him and the door. Barring him from escape, from sunrise, from life.

He considered a surprise attack upon the big clown that stood there laughing like a chessy cat. But before his fist could travel an inch, Joe's own rushed out to crush him like a battering ram. Then Joe stood over him.

"Git into yo' damn rags, Slemmons, and dat quick."

Slemmons scrambled to his feet and into his vest and coat. As he grabbed his hat, Joe's fury overrode his intentions and he grabbed at Slemmons with his left hand and struck at him with his right. The right landed. The left grazed the front of his vest. Slemmons was knocked a somersault into the kitchen and fled through the open door. Joe found himself alone with Missie May, with the golden watch charm clutched in his left fist. A short bit of broken chain dangled between his fingers.

Missie May was sobbing. Wails of weeping without words. Joe stood, and after awhile he found out that he had something in his hand. And then he stood and felt without thinking and without seeing with his natural eyes. Missie May kept on crying and Joe kept on feeling so much and not knowing what to do with all his feelings, he put Slemmons' watch charm in his pants pocket and took a good laugh and went to bed.

"Missie May, whut you cryin' for?"

"Cause Ah love you so hard and Ah know you don't love *me* no mo'."

Joe sank his face into the pillow for a spell then he said huskily, "You don't know de feelings of dat yet, Missie May."

"Oh Joe, honey, he said he wuz gointer give me dat gold money and he jes' kept on after me——"

Joe was very still and silent for a long time. Then he said, "Well, don't cry no mo', Missie May. Ah got yo' gold piece for you."

The hours went past on their rusty ankles. Joe still and quiet on one bed-rail and Missie May wrung dry of sobs on the other. Finally the sun's tide crept upon the shore of night and drowned all its hours. Missie May with her face stiff and streaked towards the window saw the dawn come into her yard. It was day. Nothing more. Joe wouldn't be coming home as usual. No need to fling open the front door and sweep off the porch, making it nice for Joe. Never no more breakfast to cook; no more washing and starching of Joe's jumper-jackets and pants. No more nothing. So why get up?

With this strange man in her bed, she felt embarrassed to get up and dress. She decided to wait till he had dressed and gone. Then she would get up, dress quickly and be gone forever beyond reach of Joe's looks and laughs. But he never moved. Red light turned to yellow, then white.

From beyond the no-man's land between them came a voice. A strange voice that yesterday had been Joe's.

"Missie May, ain't you gonna fix me no breakfus'?"

She sprang out of bed. "Yeah, Joe. Ah didn't reckon you wuz hongry."

No need to die today. Joe needed her for a few more minutes anyhow.

Soon there was a roaring fire in the cook stove. Water bucket full and two chickens killed. Joe loved fried chicken and rice. She didn't deserve a thing and good Joe was letting her cook him some breakfast. She rushed hot biscuits to the table as Joe took his seat.

He ate with his eyes in his plate. No laughter, no banter.

"Missie May, you ain't eatin' yo' breakfus'."

"Ah don't choose none, Ah thank yuh."

His coffee cup was empty. She sprang to refill it. When she turned from the stove and bent to set the cup beside Joe's plate, she saw the yellow coin on the table between them.

She slumped into her seat and wept into her arms.

Presently Joe said calmly, "Missie May, you cry too much. Don't look back lak Lot's wife aud turn to salt."

The sun, the hero of every day, the impersonal old man that beams as

brightly on death as on birth, came up every morning and raced across the blue dome and dipped into the sea of fire every evening. Water ran down hill and birds nested.

Missie knew why she didn't leave Joe. She couldn't. She loved him too much, but she could not understand why Joe didn't leave her. He was polite, even kind at times, but aloof.

There were no more Saturday romps. No ringing silver dollars to stack beside her plate. No pockets to rifle. In fact the yellow coin in his trousers was like a monster hiding in the cave of his pockets to destroy her.

She often wondered if he still had it, but nothing could have induced her to ask nor yet to explore his pockets to see for herself. Its shadow was in the house whether or no.

One night Joe came home around midnight and complained of pains in the back. He asked Missie to rub him down with liniment. It had been three months since Missie had touched his body and it all seemed strange. But she rubbed him. Grateful for the chance. Before morning, youth triumphed and Missie exulted. But the next day, as she joyfully made up their bed, beneath her pillow she found the piece of money with the bit of chain attached.

Alone to herself, she looked at the thing with loathing, but look she must. She took it into her hands with trembling and saw first thing that it was no gold piece. It was a gilded half dollar. Then she knew why Slemmons had forbidden anyone to touch his gold. He trusted village eyes at a distance not to recognize his stick-pin as a gilded quarter, and his watch charm as a four-bit piece.

She was glad at first that Joe had left it there. Perhaps he was through with her punishment. They were man and wife again. Then another thought came clawing at her. He had come home to buy from her as if she were any woman in the long house. Fifty cents for her love. As if to say that he could pay as well as Slemmons. She slid the coin into his Sunday pants pocket and dressed herself and left his house.

Half way between her house and the quarters she met her husband's mother, and after a short talk she turned and went back home. Never would she admit defeat to that woman who prayed for it nightly. If she had not the substance of marriage she had the outside show. Joe must leave *her*. She let him see she didn't want his old gold four-bits too.

She saw no more of the coin for some time though she knew that Joe

could not help finding it in his pocket. But his health kept poor, and he came home at least every ten days to be rubbed.

The sun swept around the horizon, trailing its robes of weeks and days. One morning as Joe came in from work, he found Missie May chopping wood. Without a word he took the ax and chopped a huge pile before he stopped.

"You ain't got no business choppin' wood, and you know it."

"How come? Ah been choppin' it for de last longest."

"Ah ain't blind. You makin' feet for shoes."

"Won't you be glad to have a lil baby chile, Joe?"

"You know dat 'thout astin' me."

"Iss gointer be a boy chile and de very spit of you."

"You reckon, Missie May?"

"Who else could it look lak?"

Joe said nothing, but he thrust his hand deep into his pocket and fingered something there.

It was almost six months later Missie May took to bed and Joe went and got his mother to come wait on the house.

Missie May was delivered of a fine boy. Her travail was over when Joe came in from work one morning. His mother and the old women were drinking great bowls of coffee around the fire in the kitchen.

The minute Joe came into the room his mother called him aside.

"How did Missie May make out?" he asked quickly.

"Who, dat gal? She strong as a ox. She gointer have plenty mo'. We done fixed her wid de sugar and lard to sweeten her for de nex' one."

Joe stood silent awhile.

"You ain't ast 'bout de baby, Joe. You oughter be mighty proud cause he sho is de spittin' image of yuh, son. Dat's yourn all right, if you never git another one, dat un is yourn. And you know Ah'm mighty proud too, son, cause Ah never thought well of you marryin' Missie May cause her ma used tuh fan her foot round right smart and Ah been mighty skeered dat Missie May wuz gointer git misput on her road."

Joe said nothing. He fooled around the house till late in the day then just before he went to work, he went and stood at the foot of the bed and asked his wife how she felt. He did this every day during the week.

On Saturday he went to Orlando to make his market. It had been a long time since he had done that.

Meat and lard, meal and flour, soap and starch. Cans of corn and tomatoes. All the staples. He fooled around town for awhile and bought bananas and apples. Way after while he went around to the candy store.

"Hello, Joe," the clerk greeted him. "Ain't seen you in a long time."

"Nope, Ah ain't been heah. Been round in spots and places."

"Want some of them molasses kisses you always buy?"

"Yessuh." He threw the gilded half dollar on the counter. "Will dat spend?"

"Whut is it, Joe? Well, I'll be doggone! A gold-plated four-bit piece. Where'd you git it, Joe?"

"Offen a stray nigger dat come through Eatonville. He had it on his watch chain for a charm—goin' round making out iss gold money. Ha ha! He had a quarter on his tie pin and it wuz all golded up too. Tryin' to fool people. Makin' out he so rich and everything. Ha! Ha! Tryin' to tole off folkses wives from home."

"How did you git it, Joe? Did he fool you, too?"

"Who, me? Naw suh! He ain't fooled me none. Know whut Ah done? He come round me wid his smart talk. Ah hauled off and knocked 'im down and took his old four-bits way from 'im. Gointer buy my wife some good ole lasses kisses wid it. Gimme fifty cents worth of dem candy kisses."

"Fifty cents buys a mighty lot of candy kisses, Joe. Why don't you split it up and take some chocolate bars, too. They eat good, too."

"Yessuh, dey do, but Ah wants all dat in kisses. Ah got a lil boy chile home now. Tain't a week old yet, but he kin suck a sugar tit and maybe eat one them kisses hisself."

Joe got his candy and left the store. The clerk turned to the next customer. "Wisht I could be like these darkies. Laughin' all the time. Nothin' worries 'em."

Back in Eatonville, Joe reached his own front door. There was the ring of singing metal on wood. Fifteen times. Missie May couldn't run to the door, but she crept there as quickly as she could.

"Joe Banks, Ah hear you chunkin' money in mah do'way. You wait till Ah got mah strength back and Ah'm gointer fix you for dat."

SEWING

by

Elisabeth Wilkins Thomas

IT was so warm in the room that Isabel, sewing with her mother, seemed to fall into a dream. An hour ago the April sun burning through the glass had led her to open the window. But she soon became conscious of the cold spring wind and although she endured it, for it might be blown from beds of daffodil and mint, her mother said presently:

"Have you got to have all those windows open?"

They were making Isabel a summer dress—that is, Mrs. Thayer was making it while her daughter helped her. It was of strawberry-colored organdie, and it suited the girl's dark hair. Mrs. Thayer pressed her lips tightly together over a few pins, as she measured, pinned, stitched; she pushed aside in her search for the proper needle the tight little jug of violets that her daughter Adelaide's babies had picked for her, and that she liked to see before her as she worked; she muttered when her thread turned away from the needle's eye. She sewed steadily, rapidly, skilfully. Isabel, on the other hand, often held up her material to gaze admiringly at her seam half sewn; often took off her thimble to wipe the tip of her finger; often rested from work altogether, to contemplate the image of the finished dress. But Mrs. Thayer, although she worked so intently that she was turned a little away from her daughter, felt these pauses.

"Look here," she said without turning around, "how do you ever expect to have this dress done? It won't make itself. I am willing to help you, but you must not expect me to do it all."

"I know," said Isabel. "I really will work." Why did she, for all her twenty years, feel like a little girl when she sewed with her mother?

"I was just looking at your flowers. Shall I take them out of your way and arrange them?"

"No, I like them just the way the children brought them to me. They put them where I could look at them."

"Now stand up a minute, dear, let me try this shoulder-seam. And while you are up, would you mind putting the iron to heat, so I can press this piece?"

After the interruption, Isabel worked with more energy, and confined her dreaming to her thoughts alone. That was not really so confining as before, thoughts being freer. Those violets. Isabel herself would have tried to make some effect with them. But Mother—mothers, somehow—. What was it about them which made them so—oh, so—? She could not find a word to express the dullness of their state. She looked at her mother who sat artlessly unposed, sewing in a house-dress and shabby shoes, on a Saturday afternoon, when company might come in. Could Mother ever have been not Mother, unmarried, romantic?

"Mother, do you remember the pair of little glass compote dishes we had at Rennick Street?"

"No, dear, what were they?"

"Oh yes, you do. Dishes for our dolls, up in the nursery. Once we had some tiny round cakes in them."

Mrs. Thayer laughed, "Yes, I remember them. What about them?"

"Nothing. I don't know what made me think of them; they just popped into my mind. We treasured them so. And you promised to come up that day to a party. Do you remember?"

"What day?"

"The day we had the tiny cakes in them. It was not a birthday or anything. Perhaps it was the first party we ever had."

In memory Isabel sniffed again the faint rich odor of those long-ago dainties. An actual physical sense of them almost came into her nostrils; the taste of them just eluded her. She felt, if she could but think a little harder about them—something more important—. Into her mother's room she brought the old nursery; before her mother's table, heaped with crisp organdie, crowded with spools, pieces, papers of pins, scissors, all jumbled and tangled with colored threads, she set again the little brown varnished doll table with its cups and plates, its child's chairs and finally its two crowning dishes of cakes. Other food, no doubt, was on that table; Adelaide, no doubt, was present. But all dim. The cakes in the glass-stemmed dishes made a party, and Mother was coming to the party.

Mother came to the party. She brought a guest. More than from the fare, more than from the beloved dishes, the pleasure of that afternoon came from

the presence of Mother and her guest. Who he was, Isabel did not know. But it made no difference. He was a happy person, and he and Mother threw a glamor of grown-up happiness over the whole golden afternoon. What a feeling of well-being warmed Isabel in that hour of laughter, of gay tenderness! The pleasure of the two persons was clearly not pretended. They were "good company," they enjoyed being at the party, they enjoyed pretending to sit in the little chairs and eat the food. The child felt their enjoyment and glowed within her soul at the rightness, the grown-up rightness of it. How lovely Mother was, and what a happy person had come with her!

"Mother, who was that man"—came to Isabel's lips but crossed no further. How perversely fanciful are thoughts! That enjoyment—. How could a child know just what was being enjoyed? What leads Isabel now to reinforce so old, so dim, so flimsy a fabric of memory with fancies made up out of whole cloth? To depart from an innocent dish of cakes, as a centre of interest, toward her mother's mysterious, long-ago guest? In fact, to make that guest mysterious at all? For, now, in the nursery she begins to follow her mother's eyes, to go with them smiling deep and lovely into the eyes of her guest, to go with his, rather ruefully, into her mother's. Ruefully? Well, his smile has a twist to it. One fancies all sorts of loving wishes persisting through nice renunciations, behind such a twist. She leans her tiny elbows on his knee, and when the two persons laugh together she kicks up her heels and laughs too. Why? Does she think she is included? A child might not know, but a young woman can see now, that there are only two persons in the nursery. Only two persons. Then it was as if she were seeing—well, how a room looks when no one sees it. How Mother was when she was not Mother!

Such a start had Isabel's thought given that she almost put her fingers to her lips. Had she spoken, or did her words sound only in her own ears? She had got so far away—here was her needle glancing steadily along, here was the room, still and warm, with the sunlight of the April afternoon marching in bright yellow squares over the Turkey rug, over her mother sewing quietly, unspoken to. She looked with deep respect at this silent mother. Fancy or memory? If Isabel has sewn a tapestry of fancy upon a very thin little canvas of memory, at least she has stitched a picture of a person who was once not Mother. Now, a familiar dress and a pair of small shabby shoes clothe not only this present woman, but also this woman who has been another woman, who has been many other women in the past all unknown

to her daughter. A woman who has once been unmarried, a romantic personal woman, with an unfamily life of her own, and friends who are individuals for her own individual society—. Why should pity suddenly tangle itself into the thought that Mother had not always been at the mercy of her daughters' dresses, her grandchildren's offerings?

She fancied a little how it might have gone:

'Mother, who was that man you brought to our party?'

'What man? I don't remember, dear.'

Then the helps to memory, the insistence, like a cross-examination. It was not her father, although she remembered him too as a happy person. No, somehow, for some reason that she did not try to bring to words in her mind, Isabel knew she could not ask such a question. A minute ago she could have asked it most naturally. But now, something had happened. Without words, in silence, over two women sewing in a warm still room, some change had come. It would seem, looking with Isabel's eyes, as if it had come over Mrs. Thayer; but possibly it was Isabel who was changed. In some inexplicable way, her question now belonged with other people's letters which one did not open—more than that, did not read, though they lay open on a table. This long-ago party was a letter which her mother had left open on a table, and which Isabel had rather officiously tried to read.

But Mrs. Thayer was flapping her work to send the snips of thread off it, and speaking. It was not to be expected that she who had not been asked any questions should answer them, or that she who had not been told should guess herself so changed. The nursery at Rennick Street would have a hundred other leads for her memories—if indeed her mind went backward at all. For, what she said to Isabel was:

"Will you go see, dear, if the iron is hot enough? I have this part ready for you to try on."

WHAT THE NIGHTINGALE SANG

by

Mikhail Zostchenko

HOW they will laugh at us some three hundred years hence! In what a strange manner, they will say, people used to live. They had some sort of money, passports, some sort of documents registering civil property and living space measured in square meters. . . .

Well, let them laugh!

There is one trouble—they won't understand the half of it, those devils. And how can they, if their life will be something we cannot imagine, even in our dreams!

The author does not know and does not wish to guess what their existence will be like. Why harry one's nerves and shatter one's health? It's all useless. We will never see that beautiful future life.

And will it be beautiful? That is still a question. For his own peace the author supposes that even in that future there will be much nonsense and rubbish.

For the rest, perhaps that rubbish will be of insignificant character. As, for instance, somebody, if you will excuse the poverty of the thought, has been spit upon from a passing dirigible. Or the ashes in the crematorium have become mixed, and instead of a deceased relative one is handed the remains of some alien and inferior rustic. . . .

These things, of course, are unavoidable—there will occur small unpleasantnesses of every-day character. But the rest of their existence probably will be excellent and remarkable.

Perhaps they won't even have money. Everything may be free gratis. For instance, fur coats and scarves might be handed out freely in department stores. . . . "Here, Citizen," they will say, "have this excellent fur coat." And

you will pass on. Your heart won't even flutter. "No, honored comrades," you will say, "what the devil do I want with a fur coat? I have six of them already."

What the devil! How gay and attractive this future life the author pictures.

But here one must stop and think. If one eliminates from life all monetary calculations and selfish motives, into what astounding forms will life shape itself! For instance, love! Into what sumptuous flower will blossom that most delightful of emotions!

What a life that will be! What a life! With what sweet joy the author contemplates it, even at this distance and without the slightest guarantee of ever attaining it. . . . Let us take—love.

Of that one should speak separately. There are many learned men, even belonging to the party, who are generally inclined to abase that feeling. "Excuse us," they will say, "Love? There is no love. And there never was. And, on the whole, it's just one of those common acts, like funerals, for instance."

With this the author cannot agree.

The author has no desire to confess to an accidental reader, and he does not wish to reveal his intimate life to some (for the author) very unpleasant critics, but just the same, harking back, the author remembers a certain girl from the days of his youth. She had such a silly white face, hands and pitiful shoulders. And into what calf's raptures the author used to fall! What emotional moments the author experienced when, from an overflow of all sorts of noble sentiments, he used to fall on his knees and kiss the earth!

Now that fifteen years have passed and the author is greying slightly from different illnesses and jolts dealt by life, from worries for the next bite to eat; when the author simply does not want to lie and has no reason to lie; when, finally, the author wants to see life as it is, without lies or embellishments, he still admits, without fear of appearing a ridiculous being of some past century, that the learned and party circles are mistaken on this account.

The author foresees that these lines about love will call forth a volley of cruel recriminations on the part of social workers.

"Comrade," they will say, "your own person is no example. Why do you poke us in the nose," they will say, "with your own amorous pranks? Your personality is, so to speak, not in harmony with our age, and has somehow, just accidentally lived up to these days."

Do you see? Just accidentally!

"What do you mean, permit me to ask you, just accidentally? What do you advise me to do? Throw myself under a street-car?"

"That's as you please," they will say. "Under a street-car or off a bridge, only your existence has no foundation. Look at the simple people, free from temptation, and you will see how differently they argue."

Ha! Excuse me, reader, for this insignificant little laugh. The author read recently in the *Pravda* of a young barber's apprentice who, out of jealousy, bit off the nose of a girl-citizen.

Isn't that love? Would you say it was just some beetle dropping his dirt? Or was the nose, in your opinion, bitten off for the satisfaction of a savory perception? You may go to the devil! The author has no wish to upset himself and engender bad blood. He still has to finish writing this story. Then he has to take a train for Moscow and make some unpleasant calls on some kinds of literary critics to ask them not to hurry in writing their critical articles and essays about this story.

Well, then, love!

Let everyone think as he wishes about this delicate sentiment. The author, however, acknowledging his personal insignificance and lack of adaptability to our life—even though there be only a street-car ahead—the author will stick to his opinion.

The author only wants to acquaint the reader with one little love episode that transpired according to present-day ideas. Again they will say, "Little episodes! Say, young man, have you lost your wits? Who, in this cosmic scale, needs your little episodes?"

Phew! What a job it is to write literature! Perspiration will roll off you before you wade through its impassable depths.

And to what purpose? To tell some love affair of the citizen Bylinkin.

He is neither friend nor brother to the author. The author has never borrowed money from him, and has no ideological connections with him.

If one were to speak the truth, the author is entirely indifferent to him. And the author has no desire to paint him with strong colors. Besides, the author does not even remember well the face of that Bylinkin, Vassily Vassilyevitch.

As to the other faces of persons active in some way or another in this story, even those other faces passed before the author's gaze without arousing

his curiosity. With the exception, perhaps, of Lizochka Roundoukova, for quite special, and, so to speak, subjective reasons.

Mishka Roundoukoff—her brother, a komsomol—he remembers much less vividly. He was an extremely aggressive and impudent fellow. As to his physical appearance, he was one of those pale albinos with a large muzzle.

The author has no desire to enlarge upon the description of his appearance. He was of that passing age. Describe him now and he, the wretch, grows up by the time this story is published, and then where are you with Mishka Roundoukoff? And where did those moustaches come from, when at the time of the events described there were no moustaches at all?

As regards the old woman—Mother Roundoukova, so to speak—the reader will hardly feel any disappointment if we pass over the old woman entirely. Especially since it is generally difficult to describe old women artistically. Let the devil analyze what sort of an old woman. And who would want the description of her nose, for instance? A nose is a nose, and its detailing will not make this life any easier for the reader.

Of course the author would not have undertaken to write an artistic tale if he had only such meager and insignificant knowledge of his heroes. He has enough information, though. For instance, the author can picture all their life very vividly. Their small Roundoukoff house. Such a dark one, only one-storied. On the facade, Number 22. A bit higher up a boathook is painted on a little board. That's in case of fire. Who must carry what? The Roundoukoffs, it means, must bring a boathook. But do they have a boathook? What if they haven't? . . . Well, it's not the business of artistic literature to find out, and draw the facts to the attention of the provincial administration.

And all the interior of this house of the Roundoukoffs—its material formation, so to speak, in the sense of furnishings—stands sufficiently outlined in the author's memory. . . . Three rooms, no large one. . . . A crooked floor. Bekker piano. Such a painful piano. But one can play on it. Some other bits of furnishings. A couch. A cat or a dog on the couch. On the mirrored mantelpiece—a clock under a bell-glass. The bell-glass is dusty. And the mirror itself is murky—will tell you lies about your face. . . . A large chest . . . smells of naphthaline, and dead flies. . . .

What a bore it would be for citizens from the capital to live in that house! It would also be a bore for the citizen from the capital to enter their kitchen, where wet laundry hangs on a line. And at the stove the old woman

cooks victuals. Peels potatoes, for instance. The peelings coil from under the knife like a ribbon.

May the reader not imagine, however, that the author is describing these minor details with any love or rapture. Not at all. There is no pleasure nor romanticism in these trifling reminiscences, none whatsoever. The author knows these houses, and the kitchens. He's been in them. Has lived in them. Perhaps even lives in one now. . . . There's nothing good in that: just piteous pity. You step into that kitchen and you will surely stick your nose into wet underwear. Not so bad if it's a nobler part of the outfit, but it's liable to be some wet stocking, God forgive! It's disgusting, with your face in a stocking! May the devil take it! Such odiousness!

For reasons not connected with artistic literature, the author was called upon to visit the Roundoukoffs several times. And he was always surprised that in such rubbish and shallowness there could live such an exceptional young lady, such a lily of the valley and nasturtium as was Lizochka Roundoukova.

The author does not exalt the human being too much. It's about time, citizens, to refrain from this senseless pride in oneself. The author reckons that if a cuttle fish can live on slime a human being should be able to live amid wet wash.

Just the same, the author always used to feel very, very sorry for Lizochka Roundoukova.

In due time we will speak of her fully and in detail. At present, however, the author is forced to relate something about the citizen Vassily Vássilyevitch Bylinkin. Where he came from. And is he reliable politically? And what is his relationship to the Roundoukoffs? And is he related to them by ties of blood?

No, he is no relative of theirs. Only accidentally and temporarily did he become entangled with their lives.

The author has already warned the reader that he does not remember any too well the physiognomy of Bylinkin. Just the same, the author, shutting his eyes, can visualize him as if alive.

This Bylinkin always walked slowly, even thoughtfully. Batted his eyes terribly and often. Kept his hands behind his back. And had a figure somewhat stooped, as if bent under worldly circumstance. Bylinkin wore his heels down on the inside, right to the insole.

As for his education, he gave the impression of having the education of not less than four grades of the old gymnasium.

His social origin—unknown.

The man arrived from Moscow during the very heat of the revolution and spread no information about himself.

And why he arrived is also unclear. Did the provinces seem more lucrative to him? Or was he one who could not remain in fixed abode and was attracted, so to speak, by the lure of unknown distances and adventures? The devil may search his soul! You can't penetrate every psychology.

But it seems most probable that he thought the food was fatter in the provinces. Because, those first days, the man used to go around the markets and stare with appetite at the loaves of fresh bread and the mountains of products.

For the rest, on what he fed is an unsolved mystery to the author. He may even have stretched out his hand. Or, perhaps, he gathered corks from bottles of mineral and fruit waters. And then sold them afterwards. Such desperate speculators were known in the town.

But it was visible that the man did not live well. He wore off, and began losing his hair. And he walked timidly, looking to all sides and dragging his feet. He even stopped batting his eyes and looked before him immovably and with boredom.

But later on, for unexplained reasons, he began going uphill. At the moment of the unfolding of our love story, Bylinkin had a secure social position, a government job with the salary of the seventh class plus extras.

By that time Bylinkin had, as to figure, somewhat rounded out; had, so to speak, again poured in the lost living-juices, and again as formerly batted his eyes with ease.

And he walked about the streets with the solid gait of a man thoroughly steeled by life, a man with the right to existence and knowing his own full value.

And, really, at the moment of the unfolding of the events, he was in the thirty-second year of his age and the full prime of his life.

He promenaded much and often through the streets and, brandishing his cane, he beat off the flowers along the road, or grass, or even leaves.

Sometimes he sat down on a bench and boldly breathed with his full chest, smiling happily.

What he was thinking about and what exceptional ideas crowded into

his head—nobody knows. Possibly he thought of nothing at all. Possibly he was simply imbued with the ecstacy of his lawful existence. Or, most probably, he thought of the fact that he absolutely had to change living quarters.

And really—he lived with the deacon of the old church, and, in view of his government position, was very much worried to be staying in the house of a person so besmirched politically.

He kept asking whether anyone knew, for God's sake, of some apartment or a room, as it was becoming beyond his strength to live with the servant of a certain cult.

And, finally, someone, out of the goodness of his soul, procured him a small room, two square meters in size. That happened to be the house of the esteemed Roundoukoffs.

Father Deacon had no use whatsoever for this Bylinkin, but, obviously wounded in his vague but estimable feelings, the deacon reviled him in the most terrible manner, and even threatened to beat up on Bylinkin on some given occasion.

And when Bylinkin was piling his belongings onto a cart the deacon stood at the widow and guffawed loud and artificially, wishing thereby to show his complete indifference to the departure.

The deacon's wife, however, kept running out from time to time and throwing some of the things into the cart, calling out: "May your way be smooth! Drop like a stone into water! We are not holding you!"

The people and neighbors who had gathered laughed with pleasure, throwing transparent hints as to their possible amorous relationship. The author will not affirm the truth of this. He doesn't know. And does not care to introduce unnecessary gossip into elegant literature.

The room had been let to Bylinkin, Vassily Vassilyevitch, without any view to profit or any particular need for it. Rather, Darya Vassilyevna Roundoukova was afraid that, during this apartment crisis, they might become crowded through the forcible intrusion of some rough and unwanted element.

Bylinkin even drew some profit from these circumstances. And passing the Bekker piano he squinted at it angrily and remarked with displeasure that such an instrument was, generally speaking, quite superfluous, and that he, Bylinkin, was a quiet man, a man shaken by life, who had been on two fronts and under the fire of heavy artillery, and could not stand unnecessary bourgeois sounds.

The old woman, offended, replied that the piano had stood there forty years, and that they could not break it or pull the strings out of it to satisfy Bylinkin's whims, especially since Lizochka Roundoukova was learning to play the instrument, which might even become the main aim of her life.

Bylinkin waved the woman aside, saying that his words had been uttered in the form of a delicate request, and not at all as a strict command.

Here the deeply offended old woman began crying, and came near refusing him the room altogether—had she not thought of the possibility of enforced tenantry from another quarter.

Bylinkin moved in the morning, and until evening groaned in his room, fixing and arranging everything according to his big-city tastes.

Two or three days passed quietly and without any changes.

Bylinkin went to his work, returned late, and walked for a long time about his room, scraping the floor with his felt slippers. In the evening he chewed something and finally fell asleep, snoring slightly and twisting his nose.

Lizochka Roundoukova moved quietly these two days, and asked her mother and Mishka Roundoukoff several times what sort of man this Bylinkin seemed to be; whether he smoked a pipe, and had he ever had any affiliations with the naval commissariat.

At last, on the third day, she herself saw Bylinkin.

It was early in the morning, Bylinkin, as usual, was getting ready to go to work.

He passed through the corridor in his night-shirt, with an open collar. The suspenders of his trousers hung behind him, waving to and fro. He walked slowly, carrying in one hand his towel and cake of scented soap. With the other he smoothed his hair, ruffled during the night.

She stood in the kitchen at her customary duties, blowing the charcoal in the samovar or tearing a bit of kindling from a dry log.

On seeing him she exclaimed softly and darted aside, ashamed of her disorderly morning toilette.

But Bylinkin, standing in the doorway, viewed the maiden with some amazement, and even with rapture.

And truly, that morning she was beautiful.

That youthful freshness of a slightly sleepy face. The careless stream of blond hair. Slightly tilted nose. And clear eyes. And the figure, slight in stature, but full. All that was extraordinarily attractive in her.

There was in her that enchanted carelessness and perhaps even slovenliness of the type of Russian woman who jumps out of bed in the morning unwashed, and in felt slippers on bare feet begins to bustle about her house.

The author, perhaps, even likes such women. He has nothing against such women.

In the main there is nothing good in them, these full-bodied women with lazy eyes. There is no vivaciousness in them, no briskness of temperament, no coquetry of pose. Just—moves about slowly, in soft slippers, uncombed. . . .

Generally speaking, if you like, it's even repulsive. Well, but there you are.

And a strange thing it is, reader.

Some doll-like lady, so to speak, product of the Western bourgeois culture, is not at all after the author's heart. Her hair is dressed the devil knows in what manner—Greek, don't dare touch it! And should you touch her—there is no end of cries and scandal. Such unnatural clothing. Again don't come near. You'll either tear or soil it. And who, tell me, needs that? Where is there any charm or joy of existence?

Ours, for instance—when she sits down you see clearly that she is sitting, and not stuck on a pin, like that other one. That other one sits as if she were on a pin. Who needs that?

The author is thrilled by many features of foreign culture; as regards women, however, the author sticks to his national views.

Bylinkin also seemed to like that kind of woman.

At any rate he stood now before Lizochka Roundoukova and looked at her with joyful amazement, slightly opening his mouth from ecstasy and not even picking up his hanging suspenders.

But that lasted only a moment.

Lizochka Roundoukova, sighing softly, darted about the kitchen and went out, arranging on her way her toilette and disheveled hair.

Toward evening, when Bylinkin returned from work, he walked slowly to his room, hoping to meet Lizochka in the hall. But he didn't meet her.

Later on, in the evening, Bylinkin meandered into the kitchen five or six times and finally met Lizochka Roundoukova, to whom he bowed terribly politely and elegantly, slightly bending his head to one side and making that indefinite gesture with his hands which expresses enchantment and extreme pleasure.

A few days of such encounters in the passage and the kitchen brought them considerably closer to one another.

Bylinkin came home now and listened to Lizochka play some tra-la on the piano, asking her to play more and more of that ticklish music.

And she played some dog's waltz or shimmy and took some spirited chords of the second or third, or perhaps, the devil may decipher them, even the fourth rhapsody of Liszt.

And he, Bylinkin, who had been twice on all fronts and fired at by heavy artillery, listened as if he heard for the first time those cracking sounds of the Bekker piano. And, sitting in his room, he leaned back in his armchair meditating on the beauties of human existence.

A gorgeous life began for Mishka Roundoukoff. Twice Bylinkin gave him a few kopecks, and once even half a ruble, asking Mishka to whistle softly between his fingers when the old woman was in the kitchen and Lizochka alone in the room.

Why Bylinkin needed that knowledge is not at all clear to the author. The old woman watched the amorous couple with perfect admiration, planning to get them married not later than Fall and have Lizochka off her hands.

Neither did Mishka Roundoukoff analyze Bylinkin's psychological affinities, but whistled some six times a day, inviting Bylinkin into this room or that.

And Bylinkin entered the room indicated, sat beside Lizochka, first exchanged some insignificant sentence with her, then asked her to play on the instrument one of her favorite pieces. And there, by the piano, Bylinkin put his knotted fingers, the fingers of a man with philosophical leanings, who had been seared by life and gone through the fire of heavy artillery, on Lizochka's white hands and asked the lady to tell him of her life, deeply interested in the details of her previous existence. Sometimes he asked her whether she had ever felt the palpitation of real, true love, or was it happening to her for the first time.

And the maiden smiled enigmatically and, softly fingering the piano keys, said, "I don't know."

They fell in love with each other passionately and dreamily.

They could not see each other without tears and tremors.

And every time they met they experienced anew the flood of enrapturing joy.

As for the rest, Bylinkin inwardly regarded himself with some fear, and thought with amazement that he, who had twice been on all the fronts and earned the right of existence with extraordinary difficulty, would now easily give his life for one little whim of this sufficiently pretty maiden.

And, aligning in his memory all the women who had crossed his life—even the last one, the deacon's wife, with whom he had an affair after all, the author is sure of it—Bylinkin was convinced that only now, in the thirty-second year of his life, had he encountered the genuine tremor of sentiment.

Whether life's juices were expanding in Bylinkin, or whether the man had a predisposition and inclination toward abstract romantic feelings, remains for the meanwhile a mystery of nature.

At any rate Bylinkin realized that he was a different person now from what he had been before, that the composition of his blood had changed, and that all life was null and ridiculous before such an extraordinary violence of love.

And Bylinkin, this near-cynic and man hardened by life, who had been under shell fire and met death face to face more than once, this sensitive Bylinkin, even took to poetry, writing half a score of different verses and one ballad.

The author is not acquainted with his verses, but one poem, entitled *To Her and To That One . . .* sent by Bylinkin to the "Dictatorship of Labor" and rejected as being incompatible with the socialistic era, became known to the author accidentally and through the amiability of the technical secretary, Ivan Abramovich Krantz.

The author has a special opinion of verses and amateur poetry, and therefore he will not fatigue the readers and typesetters with the complete poem, which was fairly long. The author offers for the attention of the typesetters only a couple of the last, most sonorous lines:

My heart's device saw love as gain.
To call it progress I was fain;
And in it I saw only the
Image of thy face so pure and free.

Ah, Liza, I am burned
Up to ashes because I learned
Love from our brief acquaintanceship.

From the point of view of the formal method those verses don't seem to be so bad, after all. But in general they are pretty scabby verses, and are in fact out of rhythm with the age.

Later Bylinkin resisted the lure of poetry and deserted the hard road of the bard. Bylinkin, always inclined to Americanism, soon tossed aside his literary achievements, buried his talent without regret, and resumed his former life without projecting his crazy ideas on paper.

Bylinkin and Lizochka, meeting now in the evenings, went out and walked about the deserted streets and boulevards far into the night. Sometimes they descended to the river and sat above the sandy steep, watching with deep and silent joy the swift waters of the Kozyavka. And sometimes they held hands and sighed softly, enchanted by the extraordinary colorings of nature, or by a light, airy cloud racing across the skies.

All this was new to them, and enchanting, and it seemed to them that they were seeing it all for the first time.

Sometimes the enamored couple left the town and walked to the forest. And there, with fingers entwined, they walked about as if they were stunned, stopping before some pine or spruce to gaze at it with amazement, sincerely marveling at the astonishing and bold function of nature that had thrown from the earth a tree so useful to humanity.

And then Vassily Bylinkin, shaken by the fact of such an uncommon existence and by its remarkable laws, gave way to his abundant emotions, fell on his knees before the young lady and kissed the earth around her feet.

All about them—the moon. All around—the mystery of night, the grass, the chirping glow-worms, the silent forest, the frogs, the insects. All around in the air such delight and appeasement. All around such enjoyment of simple existence that the author is loath to renounce and therefore in no way can consider himself a superfluous figure on the background of rising life. The author, like any human being, however insignificant, adheres to his right of existence, despite all the hue and cry of austere and impatient critics.

Well, then, Bylinkin and Lizochka liked best of all these walks out of town.

But on one of these charming walks the incautious Bylinkin caught cold, obviously from the dampness of the night, and took to his bed. He developed an illness somewhat akin to mumps.

By evening Bylinkin felt a slight chill and a cutting pain in his throat. By night his face began swelling.

Crying softly, Lizochka came to his room and, with loosened hair and soft slippers, darted from the bed to the table, at a loss what to undertake, what to do, and how to alleviate the lot of the invalid.

Mother Roundoukova—even she—rolled into the room several times during the day inquiring whether the sick man wished some cranberry jelly, which, it seemed, was incomparable in all infectious diseases.

Two days later, when Bylinkin's face had swollen until he was no longer recognizable, Lizochka ran for the doctor.

After looking over the sick person and prescribing some medicines, the doctor left, cursing inwardly because he was paid with some small change.

Lizochka Roundoukova ran after him and, overtaking him in the street, began jabbering and asking, while wringing her arms: "What is it, and how? Is there any hope?" And the doctor should know that she could not survive the loss of that person.

Then the doctor, quite used to such scenes through the exigencies of his profession, said indifferently that mumps were mumps and that, unfortunately, one did not die of the complaint.

Somewhat disappointed by the triviality of the danger, Lizochka returned home sadly and took to nursing the invalid with self-abnegation, not sparing her feeble strength nor her health, not even fearing to contract that same mumps through infection.

The first few days Bylinkin was afraid to lift himself on his pillows. Touching his swollen throat with his finger, he asked Lizochka with terror whether she would continue to love him after the illness which enabled her to see him in such deformed and loathsome condition.

But the young lady begged him not to worry, saying that, in her eyes, he had become a more imposing man than before.

And Bylinkin smiled quietly and gratefully, replying that this illness had proved better than anything else the solidity of their love.

It was a very unusual love.

After Bylinkin rose from his sickbed, and after his neck and face had resumed their former shape, he began to think that Lizochka Roundoukova had saved him from imminent destruction.

Through this, their amorous relationship acquired a certain solemnity, and even magnanimity.

On one of the days following his illness Bylinkin took Lizochka by the

hand, and with the tone of a man who had made up his mind to something, he asked her to listen carefully to him, and not to ask him, for the time being, any unnecessary questions, or break in with any of her dumb remarks.

Bylinkin said, in a long and solemn speech, that he knew fully what life was, and knew how difficult it was to exist in this world, and that earlier, when he still was an unfledged youth, he took life with criminal levity for which he paid dearly in his time; but now, having passed his thirtieth year, made wise by worldly experience, he knew how one should live—he knew the rigid and unshakable rules of life. And, taking all that into account, he was considering some changes in the life he had mapped out.

In a word, Bylinkin made a formal proposal to Lizochka Roundoukova, entreating her not to worry about her future well-being, even should she, Lizochka Roundoukova, remain unemployed in the future, and incapable of adding her adequate mite to the common modest pot.

She, flirting a bit and remarking, for the elegance of the moment, something about free love, accepted his proposal, nevertheless, with rapture, adding that she had been expecting it for a long time, and that if he had not made it she would have considered him the worst of hoodlums and criminals. As to free relations, though they are good and perfect in their time, they are not the same as all the rest, and so on.

With her glad news Lizochka Roundoukova ran to her mother, and to the neighbors, inviting them to come to the wedding, which would take place in a very short time and would have the character of a modest family reunion.

The neighbors congratulated her ardently, saying that she had been sitting in the back row long enough, and had suffered enough from the hopelessness of her existence.

Mother Roundoukova cried a bit, of course, and went to Bylinkin to make sure the pact was authentic.

And Bylinkin reassured the old woman, solemnly asking her permission to call her Mother from that day on. The woman, weeping and blowing her nose into her apron, said that she had lived fifty-three years in this world, but that this day was the happiest of her life. And, in her turn, she asked if she could call him Vassya, to which Bylinkin gracefully gave his consent.

As to Mishka Roundoukoff, Mishka took the change in his sister's life rather indifferently, and at the moment was running around the streets somewhere, cracking his pate and sticking out his tongue.

The enamoured couple ceased their walks out of town. They sat at home,

mostly, talking late into the night and discussing the plans for their future life.

And during one of these discussions Bylinkin, a pencil in hand, began to sketch out on paper the plans for their future rooms, which would be like a separate and small but comfortable apartment.

Spluttering and disputing with each other, they tried to prove where it would be best to put the bed, and where the table, and where to dispose of the dressing table.

Bylinkin tried to persuade Lizochka not to be foolish and put the dressing table in the corner.

"That's absolutely common," said Bylinkin—"to put a dressing table in the corner. Every young girl does that." It was much better, and more monumental to put the chest of drawers in the corner and to cover it was a lace scarf, which her mother, he hoped, would not refuse to give them.

"A chest in the corner is also very common," said Lizochka, almost in tears. "Besides, the chest belongs to mother, and will she let us have it? That's a question and an answer."

"Nonsense," said Bylinkin. "How can she refuse it? We can't keep our underwear on the window-sill. That's utter nonsense."

"You talk to mother, Vassya," Lizochka said severely. "Talk to her as you would to your own mother. Say 'Please, mother, give us the chest of drawers.' "

"What nonsense," said Bylinkin. "However, if you so badly want me to, I'll go at once."

And Bylinkin went into the old woman's room.

It was rather late. The woman was asleep.

Bylinkin shook her for a long time, and she, kicking at him in her sleep, would not wake up, refusing to understand what it was all about.

"Wake up, mother," said Bylinkin severely. "Can't Lizochka and I count on some sort of small comfort! Must our underwear lie around on window-sills?"

Understanding with difficulty what was wanted of her, Mother Roundoukova set to talking. The chest had stood in its place for fifty-one years, and now, in the fifty-second year, she had no intention of moving it around to other places, and throwing it around to right and left. And that she was no maker of chests of drawers. And that it was too late for her, at her age, to

learn carpentry. It was about time they understood that, and stopped affronting an old person.

Bylinkin began shaming her, saying that he, who had been on all the fronts and twice under the fire of heavy artillery, at last had the right to a quiet life.

"Shame on you, mother," said Bylinkin. "You grudge us the chest. You can't take it into your coffin with you. Know that!"

"I won't give you the chest," whined the old woman. "When I'm dead you can take all the furniture."

"Yes, you'll die," said Bylinkin with indignation. "Wait! . . ."

Seeing that the affair had begun to take a serious turn, the woman started to cry and pray, saying that in such case the lips of the innocent child, Mishka Roundoukoff, should speak the final word, all the more because he was the only male representative of their Roundoukoff race, and because by rights the chest of drawers belonged to him and not to Lizochka.

Mishka Roundoukoff, wakened, was extremely unwilling to give up the chest.

"Y-yes," said Mishka, "They might pry loose of a kopeck and then want to take the chest. Chests of drawers cost money, too."

Thereupon Bylinkin, slamming the door, went into his room, and, bitterly scolding Lizochka, told her that without the chest he was like a being without hands, and that he, hardened by fighting, knew what life was, and would not recede one step from his ideals.

Lizochka literally flitted back and forth between her mother and Bylinkin, entreating them to reach an agreement in some way, and offered to keep dragging the chest of drawers from one room to another.

Then, asking Lizochka to stop flitting, Bylinkin suggested that she go to bed immediately and gather strength to occupy herself with this fatal question early the next morning.

The morning brought no good.

The old woman, roused to anger, said with desperate resolution that she saw him, Vassily Vassilyevitch Bylinkin, through and across, and that today he demanded the chest, and tomorrow he would cook her to jelly and eat her with his bread. That's the kind of man he was.

Bylinkin yelled that he would report to the criminal investigation department to the end of securing the arrest of the old woman for propagation of obviously false and injurious rumors.

Lizochka ran from one to the other with subdued cries, begging them at least to cease yelling and try to discuss the question quietly.

Then the old woman said that she was beyond the age when one yelled, and that without yelling she could tell to all and everyone that Bylinkin had to date dined with them three times and had not endeavored, out of amiability, to offer some small compensation for at least one of the dinners.

Terribly excited, Bylinkin said with sarcasm that as to that, he had many times bought Lizochka candy and pastilles while out walking with her, and twice bouquets of flowers, and that nevertheless he was presenting no bills to her mother.

To which Lizochka, biting her lips, replied that he should cease such shameless lying; that there had been no pastilles, only some gumdrops and a small bouquet of violets, to the value of a kopeck, which had faded the next day, besides.

Having said that, Lizochka, sobbing, ran from the room, leaving all to the will of fate.

Bylinkin wanted to run after her and present his apologies for his incorrect statements, but he got into a new squabble with the old woman, called her a devil's mother, spat at her and ran out of the house.

Bylinkin left the house, and for two days his whereabouts were unknown. When he reappeared he announced in an official tone that he found it impossible to remain.

The author is ignorant of the details of his moving and of the bitter moments experienced by Lizochka. And did she experience them? And did Bylinkin regret it all, or did he act with complete assurance and decision?

The author only knows that after his departure he kept visiting Lizochka Roundoukova, in fact even after his marriage to Maroussya Ovchinnikova. Shaken by their misfortune, they sat side by side exchanging insignificant words. Sometimes, however, evoking in their memory one or another happy episode or event of the past, they spoke of it with a sad and pitiful smile, keeping back their tears.

Sometimes the mother entered the room and then all three of them bemoaned their fate.

Later on Bylinkin stopped going to the Roundoukoffs. And, meeting Lizochka on the street, he bowed to her correctly and with reserve, and passed by. . . .

Thus ended that love.

Of course, at another time, some three hundred years later, this love would not have ended in such manner. It would have blossomed, dear reader, into a sumptuous and rare flower.

But life dictates its laws.

At the conclusion of this story the author wishes to say that in the act of unfolding this simple love episode, and somewhat carried away by the experiences of the heroes, the author has dropped from view the nightingale that was so mysteriously mentioned in the title.

The author fears that the honest reader or the type-setter, or even the desperate critics, having read this story, will become upset.

"Excuse me," he will say, "but where is the nightingale? What is the idea," he will say, "of making a fool of one, of making the reader fall for an easy title?"

It would be absurd, of course, to recount the whole love story from the beginning. The author is not endeavoring to do that. The author only wishes to recall certain details.

It was at the very height of their affection when Bylinkin and the young lady used to go out of town and walk in the woods, far into the night. And there, listening to the chirp of insects or the singing of the nightingale, they stood for long spells immovable. And then Lizochka, gesturing, used to ask:

"Vassya, what do you think the nightingale sings."

To which Vassily Bylinkin usually replied reservedly:

"Her belly is empty. That's why she sings."

Only later on, when somewhat acquainted with the psychology of the young lady, Bylinkin answered in a more detailed and hazy manner, he supposed the bird sang of some beautiful future life.

Such is also the opinion of the author: of a future excellent life, say, some three hundred years, perhaps even more, hence.

Yes, reader, if only those three hundred years would pass like a dream, then how we would live!

Well, if even there it will be bad the author will agree, with a cold and empty heart, that he is a useless figure in the background of this rising life.

Then there is always time to throw oneself under the street-car.

—Translated from the Russian
by Helena Clayton